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CONSIDERATIONS *concerning*  
*the Origine and Cure of our Church-*  
*Divisions.*

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IN TWO  
SERMONS.

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The First Preach'd at PETERSFIELD, }  
May 26. 1709. }  
The Second at WAMFORD, May 11. } HAMPSHIRE.  
1710. in }

Before the Worshipful and Reverend  
R. BRIDEOAKE, B.D. Archdeacon of *Winchester*,

AND  
The Reverend the CLERGY of the Deanry of  
DROXFORD.

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By JOHN NEEDHAM, A.M.  
Rector of *Bedhampton*, and Chaplain to the Right Ho-  
nourable RICHARD, Earl of *Scarborough*.

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*Publish'd at the Request of the Reverend the CLERGY.*

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L O N D O N :

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CONSIDERATIONS *concerning the*  
*Origine of our Church-Divisions.*

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S E R M O N I.

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I C O R. III. 4.

*For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; Are ye not carnal?*

**O**F all the Precepts which our Blessed Saviour gave to Mankind, there are none he recommends more frequently, or urges with more Reason and Authority, than those of Unity and Peace amongst his Followers. He very well knew the Weight and Importance of them to the Propagation of his Faith, and the Good of his Church; and withal, what Obstructions would hereafter arise in the Pursuit and Practice of them, from the Pride and Passions, from the Ignorance and Prejudices of Men.

In his Divine Sermon on the Mount, to distinguish the Lovers of Peace with a Character, one would think, might make them fond and ambitious of it, he tells them, \* *They shall be called the Children of God*: And in the latter Periods of his Life, he bequeaths this as his best and dearest Pledge to his sorrowing Disciples; † *Peace I leave with you, my Peace give unto you*. And then again, With what Earnestness and Importunity doth he pray his heavenly Father for the Unity of his Church? ‡ *Holy Father, keep through thy own Name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are one*: Such tender and moving Expressions plainly discover how much the Desire of it affected his Mind.

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\* Matt. v. 9.

† St. John xiv. 27.

‡ St. John xvii. 11.

In the Writings of the Apostles we may meet with frequent Exhortations to the same Purpose; but our Apostle is very particular and copious on this Head; who lays himself mightily out, omits no proper Means and Reasonings, transforms himself into all Shapes, to reconcile Mens Minds, and to obviate the dangerous Infection of a then growing Schism. A vigorous and commendable Zeal for the Preservation of Peace and Unity among Christians continued for some Ages in the Church; the Vigilance, Courage and Activity of its Governors being very conspicuous on this account; who, by enacting wholesome Laws, and by erecting strong Barriers to guard against Innovation and Faction, did all they could to leave so sacred a Depositum, as their Religion was, safe and inviolable to Posterity.

These are noble, and ought to be engaging, Examples to us in our Endeavours after Peace, and towards composing those unhappy Differences, which at present so scandalously overspread the Face of the Church. 'Tis true, our Divisions and Animosities are now swollen to a mighty Height, our Adversaries are daring and resolute, and a daily Superfétation of Errors makes all Attempts of this kind still more difficult; but this, in reason, ought not to depress, but to raise our Courage: Where the Honour of Religion, and the Good of Mens Souls are so much concern'd, we, to whom the Word of Reconciliation is committed, and who are appointed the Guardians and Conservators of the Church's Peace, should exert our selves so much the more, and make our Duty alone outweigh all other Considerations whatever.

But instead of this, and to our shame be it spoken, hath not almost an universal Numbness and Stupefaction seiz'd our Spirits? Doth not our Coldness and Indifferency at once, make us the Prey, and the Scorn of our Enemies; whilst they, with indefatigable Industry, are carrying on their Designs against us both in Private and Publick; and, by Fraud and Force, are sapping the Foundation of our Constitution?

From whence can so base and degenerate a Neglect, in one of the most Solemn and Important Duties of our Religion proceed? Are not the Mischiefs of our Divisions, now the Numbers are increas'd, as formidable, as in any Age of the Church? Is it the great Difficulties we have to struggle with, and the Experience of former unsuccessful Attempts, (a very common Discouragement to weak and easie Minds) which make us despond? Or finally is it, that we had rather

do I expose our selves in the Honours and Secular Advantages of Religion, than undergo the Labour and Fatigue of it? Rather drowse away the precious Minutes of our Time with the sleeping Disciples, than watch and pray with Christ, tho' the Insults of our Enemies, and the Pain and Shame of the Cross are immediately to succeed? But doth not both Duty and Danger, Honour and Interest, concur to kindle in our Breasts a Zeal, in some measure, equal to the Danger and Difficulties that press upon us? Certainly, did but the fatal Consequences of our unhappy Divisions, or the invaluable Blessings of Peace, affect us as they ought to do; did we but consider what Obligations we lie under to God, and his Church, to suppress Faction and Division, and to promote Peace and Charity among Christians; we might quickly see what great Reason we have to do any thing to avoid the one, and pursue the other, that either Labour or Study, that Patience or Charity can suggest.

And nothing but the Consideration of the great Obligations that lie upon me to do all I can to promote the Peace and Happiness of the Church, could ever have prevail'd on me to attempt an Argument, which requires, and hath so often employ'd, the greatest Men of our Church; but when all's in Disorder, 'tis every ones Duty to oppose a common Danger; and tho' some may have more Skill or Strength to do it than others, yet the weakest and slowest may contribute something; at least, ought to express a Courage and Readiness to assist in extinguishing a Flame, as, in time, if let alone, may consume us all.

Now to discharge my Duty and Conscience herein, I have made choice of these Words for the Subject of my present Discourse, in which St. Paul expostulates with the *Corinthians* for their unreasonable Divisions and Animosities on account of their different Sentiments about some Points and Doctrines of Religion, and withal tells them, as no Names, no Authorities would bear them out in such Practises; so, whatever Zeal they might pretend in excuse for themselves, that it flow'd from a very base and faulty Principle. And, truly, the great Conformity betwixt the Divisions at *Corinth*, and those among our selves, give me but too just an occasion for the like Expostulation, and of putting the same Question to our *English* Dissenters, that St. Paul did to his factious *Corinthians*, *While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; Are ye not carnal?* To accommodate these Words



then to my present design, I shall, and I think I pertinently may, proceed in this following Method.

I. I will consider what Differences amongst Men, I mean in Matters of Religion, are truly and properly culpable; One may follow *Paul's* Opinion, and another *Apollo's*, in some Points, and under some Circumstances, without any blame at all.

II. In the great Variety of Opinions amongst us to discover where to fix the Blame; for while one saith, *I am of Paul*; and another, *I am of Apollos*; tho', as it may happen, this may be spoken innocently enough; yet, generally speaking, one must be, and sometimes both are, in the Wrong.

III. To trace out the true Spring and Origine from whence our Divisions flow: Which will be of great Use, not only to know the real Causes of them, but also to obviate the Pretences which the Guilty make in their own Justification: *Are ye not carnal?*

IV. To consider what Remedies and Applications have been, or may be, thought useful and requisite to heal our Divisions, to remove those fond and canting Distinctions, *I am of Paul*, and *I am of Apollos*; and, instead of such invidious Characters, may prevail with Men to follow after things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edifie another.

1. I am to consider what Differences among Men, I mean in Matters of Religion, are truly and properly culpable: One may follow *Paul's* Opinion, and another *Apollo's*, in some Points, and under some Circumstances, without any blame at all. And,

1. First, I assert negatively, That a bare Diversity of Judgment in the Rituals and Circumstantials of Religion; or the different Sentiments and Apprehensions of Men as to the speculative and doctrinal Parts of it; or finally their various Opinions even in some fundamental Articles of Faith, I mean not as to their Being and Reality, but in their Reasonings about, and their Explications of, them; a bare Diversity of Judgment in any of these Cases, is not of that Importance, as not to be indulg'd to frail Mortals, as long as the Vitals of Religion are preserv'd sound, and nothing is advanced that evacuates the Necessity of Faith and Repentance, and a holy Life; that disturbs not the Peace and Order of the Church, or makes a Breach of Charity among Christians.

The Doctrines of Election, Reprobation, Free-will, Grace, and the like, have been differently understood even



by the Divines of our own Church; and yet they have argued and disputed about them, without Scandal to the World, or Prejudice to Religion. That we are justified through Faith in Christ, that our Bodies shall be raised up at the last Day, that the Divine and Human Natures are personally united in Christ, that there are Three Persons in the Deity, are Articles so essential to the Christian Religion, that a Man cannot be a Christian, but he must believe them. But many good Men have entertain'd very different Apprehensions as to the *Modus* and Explication of them. And the various Schemes and Hypothesis which have been fram'd by learned Men for this end, as they cannot be all true, nor is it an easie matter, in Mysteries so much above our Capacities, to tell which is true; so, as long as Men hold firm to the Foundation, and disown the ill Consequences of their particular Opinions about them, God, who has made us infirm and fallible Creatures, will in Mercy bear with such simple Errors as are the Effects of a Finite, rather than of a corrupt Understanding.

In this mortal State, Men will be Men, and are too far remov'd from the Fountain of Light and Truth, to arrive at exactness in their Disquisitions. It cannot be expected we should always hit the *Mark*, when the Object we aim at is only *seen through a Glass darkly*. If Men will think and reason at all, 'tis not possible, considering what various Passions and Imperfections they lie under, always to fall into the same Sentiments of Things, nor is it at all necessary they should, but rather the contrary, the Variety of Mens Judgments and Apprehensions being in some sense useful and ornamental to the World, thereby to display the more the Wisdom of God in our formation; to advance Arts and Science to greater heights; to render Conversation more useful and lively; and to give proper occasion for the Exercise of Forbearance and Moderation towards one another: None of which could be, did the Genius and Thoughts of Men stand all to the same Bent and Position.

When therefore our Apostle exhorts his *Corinthians* \* by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they should all speak the same Thing, — and be perfectly join'd together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment; he must be understood to mean nothing more than what will comport with the Condi-

\* 1 Cor. i. 10.

tion of Mankind in this mortal State; and is necessary to preserve Orthodoxy in Religion, Peace in the World, and Charity and good Nature among Christians.

2. I assert positively, That

*First*, All such Differences and Disputes, let the Subject of them be never so inconsiderable, as *gender Strife*, as create unreasonable Animosities among us in the Breach of Christian Charity, are therefore blameable, and come under the Prohibition of my Text.

To see with what Bitterness and Rancor of Spirit the Disputers of this World engage themselves in the Controversies of Religion; with what Scurrility and Reflections they charge their Arguments; with what Loads of Calumny and Reproach, implacable Hatred and unchristian Heats, they pursue those who differ from them, and oppose their Sentiments; one would think, it was not Truth, but devilish Revenge and popular Applause, they sought after; and that it matter'd not how much the Honour of Religion suffer'd, provided they could but gratifie their Passions, and secure their own. The Cause of God and Religion, it's true, is a Matter of that Importance, that this (where all neutrality is a Sin) if any thing, may justifie a Man in shewing some Warmth and Concern in its behalf; but even here such Care and Discretion must be us'd, as to do it in such a manner as may not derive a Dishonour upon it. It is not enough to have Truth on my side, but I am oblig'd to maintain it by just and warrantable, by peaceable and christian-like, Means; since no Truth will justifie me in the Defence of it, whilst I give way to such furious Courses and Emotions, to such unreasonable Heats and dishonest Contentions, as fully the Lustre of it, and may prejudice Men against it.

*Secondly*, Such as lead Men into Factions and Parties: The Custom has been too general, as well as too mischievous, to late, for People to range themselves under the Denomination of one Party or other; to set up some leading Principle as the Characteristick of their Union, and then with united Force and Obstinacy, wherein little regard is had to Good or Evil, True or False, Right or Wrong, but only as they are Incidents to the main and governing Tenent; to worry and devour one another: As if to serve a Cause nothing was not lawful; or that, when the Apostle in my Text gives this Character of the *Corinthians*, that *one said, I am of Paul*; and

another, *I am of Apollos*; he design'd it not for a Reproof, but an Encomium; not to express their Carnality, but their Wisdom: Whereas, neither the Learning of *Paul*, nor the Eloquence of *Apollos*, nor the Authority of *Peter*, let me add, nor the Divinity of Christ himself, can authorize People in the Breach of Unity, and in forming themselves into Sects and Parties.

Tell me then, Why should a Man, from any vain fondness of some darling Notion, fetter up his Reason and Judgment to any Party upon Earth? Why should he bring himself under such unequal Conditions, as, with unreasonable Bigottry, to reject or esponse every thing from the Relation it bears to the Principles of his own Sect? Why, I pray, should he thus anticipate his own Judgment, clap a Bias on his Mind, and engage himself to think, and speak, and do, just as other People would have him? Truth and Religion are of too catholic and impartial a Nature, to admit of such narrow Principles, as lay the Foundation of Quarrels and Dissentions among Men. 'Tis very obvious, that the Party-Divisions in this Church and Nation, are not the least Scandal to the Friends, but perhaps, the greatest Jest and Diversion, to the Enemies, of our Constitution; who must needs take a secret Pleasure in beholding those childish Scuffles and Contentions among us; and to see that Force and Resolution, which united, ought to be laid out on them, spent and exhausted in the little Views and Concerns of a Party.

Thirdly, Such Differences are the most fatal and pernicious, however small the Grounds of them may be, which terminate in an open Rupture and Schism: A Sin this, in the Nature and Consequences of it, hardly to be parallel'd. And were we to estimate the Greatness from those black and horrid Characters the Scriptures give us of it, Theft, Murther, and Adultery, could not appear greater. And then it has a very ill effect upon Religion in general, by weakening the Force and Efficacy of it on Mens Minds; by diluting that Vigour and Spirit which ought to be employ'd in more important Considerations; by very much abating of that mutual Confidence and Charity among Christians, which is requir'd as a Duty, and is proper as a discretional Means, to promote the Interest and Honour of Religion; finally, by scandalizing those who are yet without the Pale of the Church, and by giving too far a Temptation to some loose and profligate Spirits within it, to run into such Principles, as are destructive



of all, both reveal'd, and natural, Religion; it being too plain to be denied, that Immorality, Prophaneness, and Scepticism, have begun, encreas'd, and flourish, from our Divisions; and, I may add, will only be cur'd with them too.

These are all Reflections so just and natural, that every Party will easily subscribe to them: Hitherto then we are agreed: But tho' the Mischiefs of our Divisions be so obvious and acknowledged, yet where the Guilt of them lies, is like to be the Subject of eternal Dispute.

Our Adversaries seem perfectly easie with themselves on this account; retort on us the Schism we charge them with, and are ready to justify their Conduct against all the Reasons and Arguments we can bring: And truly, was the Merits of a Cause to be measur'd by the Assurance of its Abettors, I verily believe the Advantage would lie much on their side; and considering with what Bravery and Resolution they defend themselves, or attack us, one would think, that nothing but Truth and Certainty could give them that Courage; and that Episcopacy, Liturgies, and the Ceremonies of our Church, were as point blank against the *Ten Commandments*, as Rebellion, Lying, or Hypocrisie. But that their great Opinion and Confidence of themselves is no Proof or Argument of their Innocency, I shall endeavour to make appear from my Second General; which was,

2. In the great Variety of Opinions among us, to discover where to fix the Blame: *For while one saith, I am of Paul; another I am of Apollos*; tho', as it may happen, this may be spoken innocently enough; yet, generally speaking, one must be, and sometimes both are, in the Wrong. This I shall do not by entring into a particular Discussion of all the Differences among us, which would be an endless Work, but by briefly laying down such plain and easie Propositions as may serve to lead us into a Resolution of the Case before us.

*First*, then I say, Our Blessed Saviour, after he had declar'd the Will of his heavenly Father to the World, and had done and suffered all those things for which he was sent into it, did commission and authorize his Apostles to propagate those saving Truths, he had either deliver'd to them in Person, or should afterward reveal to them by his Spirit; and, by Baptism, to admit Men into the Profession and Priviledges of his Faith.

The Government of his Church, thus to be collected, was under himself, committed to his said Apostles, with Power

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likewise to appoint fit Persons to succeed them in the ordinary Exercise of their Jurisdiction: Which Succession, by a constant and perpetual Devolution of Persons, was to continue in his Church till the Consummation of all Things.

The particular Form of Church Government instituted and settled by the Apostles in the Christian Church, will appear from those accounts which the Holy Scriptures, or the History of the Primitive Ages, give us of it.

Let it be observ'd then, that in the Beginning of Christianity, the Apostles, after the Conversion of any People to the Faith, did not immediately appoint fix'd Governours over them in all Churches, the want of which was supplied, either by themselves in Person, by their Epistles, by Messengers dispatch'd from time to time as occasions requir'd, or by extraordinary Persons acted by a Divine *Assensus*.

But before the Apostles left the World, they settled ordinary and fix'd Governours in the Churches they had planted; thus *Timothy* was appointed at *Ephesus*, and *Titus* at *Crete*, and Church-History gives us the Names of several others, who, from the first Settlement of Christianity, presided in the several Apostolick Churches. These Governours, as we find from the earliest Accounts we have, had several inferior and subordinate Officers under them, for the Administration of the Word and Sacraments, and the ordinary Exercise and Functions of Religion: But then the Power of the Keys, of giving Orders, of punishing Delinquents, and of making Laws for the better Government of their respective Churches, was chiefly and eminently lodg'd in them.

As to the Extent of Jurisdiction in those who succeeded the Apostles in the ordinary Exercise of Church Power, it might be at first, whilst Persecutions were hot, and Converts few, sometimes only over single Congregations: But as Christianity got firmer footing in the World, and greater Numbers came into the Doctrines of Christ, as the assembling together in one Place became impracticable, so the prime Ruler of each Church proportionably encreas'd the Number of his subordinate Officers, assigning to each of them his peculiar Charge under his own Authority and Inspection.

As to the subject Matter of the Power of these Church Governours, Chief Rulers, Presidents, Bishops, or by whatever other Name we please to call them, for they have had many, the Confusion and Variety of which, has, I suppose, brought a small Obscurity upon the Office and Order it self, and

hath distracted Peoples Notions about them ; as to the Subject Matter, I say, wherein their Power and Authority are to shew themselves, we may observe ; that the Articles of Faith, and the Laws of Manners and a Holy Life, the Sacraments of Religion, and the Form of Government to be observ'd in the Church, being all settled and determin'd by Divine Authority, they have no Power here to add, or alter, or abrogate ; but then the Modes, and Rules, and Orders, the Methods and Forms, to be observ'd (and of necessity some there must be) in the publick Worship of God, in the Celebration of the Sacraments, and in the Administration of Church Power, being no where particularly fix'd and determin'd by any Divine Authority, must consequently be left to the Prudence and Discretion of the Governours of the Church to be regulated and appointed by their Authority, as the various Circumstances of Time and Place, and other Reasons shall require : The Truth of which is plain from Scripture, and acknowledged by all regular Societies of Christians in the World.

All such Laws and Constitutions thus enjoin'd by the Governours of the Church, provided they tend to Order and Edification, have in them nothing incongruous to the Ends for which they were enacted, nor any circumstantial Vicioussness annexed to them, do, in Virtue of the Divine Precept, lay an Obligation on Men of Submission and Obedience to them.

The present Governours of the Church, of this established National Church in particular, preserve the same Form of Government, are the lawful Successors of, and have the same Power and Authority that were claim'd by, the Governours of the Church of the first and succeeding Ages ; the Power and Succession being alike perpetual.

*First*, As to Succession, no Period of Time, from the first Institution of the Christian Church to this Day, being assignable wherein any general Chasm and Defection has happened (not to mention the great Care that has been taken in all Ages to prevent it,) and whereby the Derivation of the Power and Succession from the Apostles might be interrupted, it must be taken for granted that the Claim of Succession is valid and good, till some Proof can be brought to overthrow it.

*Secondly*, As to Form, the present Frame and Constitution of our Church, is, in Substance, the same with, and conformable to, the Primitive Model : In Substance, I say, it is the same ; for we must carefully distinguish between the Being, and the Modes and Circumstances of a Thing.

To be regularly sent, and appointed by a competent Authority to their Office, and endowed with those Powers and Qualities now mentioned, are the principal and necessary Ideas that fill the Character of a Church Governour; but whether a Church Governour, since the Incorporation of the Ecclesiastical and Civil States, may not, by the Favour and Indulgence of Princes, enjoy and exercise some Secular Jurisdiction, or have Temporal Honours and Baronies annex'd to their Spiritual Characters; whether a Diocess should always have just such Boundaries; whether a Bishop must always live with his Clergy just about him, or may canton out his own Original, into so many distinct and subordinate, Cures, with proper Pastors in each, under his Inspection and Government, are Incidents and Circumstances variable in their Nature, introduc'd at first, and still continued, as more conformable to the present State of the Church, and the great Increase of Christians.

But if herein we vary from the first and purer Ages of the Church, it cannot be of that moment as to justifie a Separation from us, since our Blessed Saviour, by communicating with the Jewish Church, wherein for greater Alterations, as to Church Government, had happen'd, has determin'd in favour of us. If then the Governours of our Church are lawful Governours, it follows,

That all their lawful Commands and Injunctions are to be submitted to by all under their Jurisdiction, that is, by all who are united as Members of the same Civil Government; and not to do it, is a Schismatical Disobedience.

The Rites and Ceremonies, and Constitutions of our Church, are in themselves lawful, and may be submitted to with a good Conscience, being contrary to no Laws of God, particular or general; derogatory to no Act of Divine Worship; Impediments to the Exercise of no Virtue; expressive of the Ends for which they were appointed; declar'd to be alterable and different in their Nature; and instituted only as Marks of Uniformity, and proper Means for celebrating Divine Service. And give me leave to add, as what will give a farther support to the Expediency and Lawfulness of them; that all the Arguments usually brought against them, over-do the wrong, they prove too much, by making not only our Rites and Ceremonies unlawful, but any other likewise: And such Arguments as are equally good against all, conclude not rightly against any.



I add *Lastly*, No Imperfections in our Constitution, as long as the Fundamentals of Religion are preserv'd sound, can be pleaded in Justification of Separation from us. I will freely own, that our Discipline is defective, our Canons not so well chosen, nor our Liturgy so perfect as it might be, since God, had he thought fit, might have given us Rules of Government, and a Body of Laws, and a Form of Service, as perfect as the Scriptures themselves; but when he has not been pleas'd to do so, but to leave these things to human Prudence, to depart from our Communion on account of such Imperfections, is what the Nature of all human Societies, and the at least, equal Imperfections among Dissenters of all Denominations, will by no means allow of, since, on this Scheme, Communion with no Society of Christians in the World could be justifiable.

These things being so, my Argument runs thus, If the Propositions now advanc'd are just and teneble; If they are agreeable to Scripture, Reason, and the Judgment of the Christian Church, as I verily believe them to be; 'tis easy then to resolve, in the great Variety of Opinions among us, where to fix the Guilt of our unhappy Divisions; and we may now justly charge the Dissenters in their Separation from us with a great and causless Schism, since they separate from a lawful Church, on terms that are not lawful; and which, being admitted; would lay the Foundation of endless Separation.

But is it possible so many wise and good Men should run into such fatal Errors? Have not they Souls to be sav'd, and Consciences to direct them, as well as other Men? Have not they labour'd all they can to come to a right Judgment in this Affair? And, after such diligent Re-searches, why should the deplorable Mischiefs of our Divisions, and the odious Imputation of Schism be laid at their doors?

To which I Answer,

1. That this Defence would fit the Mouth of any Party whatever; and what is an equal Refuge to all, can be a just Excuse to none. It is not Peoples Perswasions and Pretences of Conscience, but Scripture, Reason, and the Nature of Things that must determine between us. I Answer.

2. Our Dissenting Brethren would do well to consider, how easie it is herein to mistake themselves, and their own Aims, that false and mistaken Principles, when espous'd with Zeal and Bigottry, may, nay must, lead Men into very dangerous Errors; that their own Passions and Prejudices may insensibly



minge themselves with their Reasonings, and usurp the Throne and Prerogative of Conscience.

But a fuller and distincter Account of these Things will more properly fall under my third General, which was,

3. To trace out the true Spring and Origine from whence our Divisions flow : which will be of great Use, not only to know the real Causes of them, but also to obviate the Pretences which the Guilty make in their own Justification. *While one saith, &c.*

It has been observ'd, there were greater Disorders in the Church of *Corinth*, than in any other planted by our Apostle : Whether the Obligation of the Mosaic Law was yet in Force ; whether Justification was by Faith, or Works ; were hotly contested between the *Jewish*, and the *Gentile* Converts. These Disputes begot in many an amphibolous Faith, made them an equivocal Generation, that held both with *Moses* and *Christ* ; and you might see baptized *Jews*, and circumcised *Christians*.

Our Apostle sets himself with all imaginable Application to break these Factions amongst them ; and, instead of applauding even those who distinguish'd themselves by his own Name, he flatly tells them all, *They were carnal, and walk'd as Men* ; that they were led by human Principles and Motives ; that secular Views, and selfish Reasons ; that Interest, Pride, Prejudice, and a childish Fondness of their Leaders, and not the true Interest of Religion, which had quite another Tendency, were what they govern'd themselves by.

This prolifick Age of ours falls nothing short of that in its factious and licentious Temper, having produc'd a Generation of Men, who in this do but too much resemble those at *Corinth*, and seem acted by the same carnal Principles ; only with this difference, that our Divisions have proceeded farther, continued longer, and were commenc'd upon much weaker grounds.

It is very true, our Dissenters make great Out-cries against, and lay great Loads upon us, as well as frame very fair and plausible Excuses for themselves : But great and splendid Declarations, without suitable Effects, prove just nothing at all : And therefore I shall take the Liberty to make a free and impartial Enquiry into the true Grounds and Reasons of the present Separation. And,

1. It is visible, that a great Part of those who make up the bulk of separate Congregations, are People of fickle and de-volatory Tempers ; ignorant, and pleas'd with any thing, or nothing,

nothing, just as it happens; who from the natural Levity of their Minds, or Want of Judgment, do not, or cannot, inform themselves as to the true Grounds of Separation. Whether the Perswasions of a Man's own Mind be a sufficient Warrant always to proceed upon; Whether this, or that, Form, of Church Government be most conformable to the original Pattern; Whether Ceremonies in general, and these in particular, may be lawfully us'd in Christian Assemblies; What Faults and Miscarriages will justify their Departure from an establish'd Church; Are Disquisitions that such Heads are no ways turn'd for: And therefore in lieu of such stubborn and knotty Enquiries, they commonly substitute some fantastick Whims and Maxims of their own, by which they govern themselves, and with which they satisfy themselves as well: For instance, That they can serve God in one Place as well as another; That the same Word and Duties are preach'd at Church and a Conventicle; That the Command of trying the Spirits, gives them a Licence of frequenting all Assemblies; And, that there are more ways to Heaven than One.

Hearing and Learning is the Whole of their Religion; but the Mischief is, they seek more to gratifie their Ears with Words and Sounds, than to inform their Understandings with the true Doctrines of Religion; and so, whilst they *\* ever Learning, they are never able to come to the Knowledge of the Truth.* † Thus by following their own Lusts, and heaping up to themselves Teachers, having itching Ears, they insensibly suck in the Principles of Separation, and are turn'd unto Fables; Popular and common Objections are learn'd by rote and receiv'd as Oracles; The Language and Tone of the Conventicle seems pious and heavenly; And that Church which at first they deserted without Reason, and even without Design, they can now calumniate without Remorse.

The regular and orderly, the cool and sober, Methods of our Service, now lose their Force, and appear too flat and uninteresting; whilst the Transport and Heat, the Excess of Language, and the moving Shew of the Presence, make what delivered elsewhere wonderfully taking, and render the Hymns and Doctrines of the Place contagious; till what at first was undesign'd, and only an idle Curiosity, is improv'd into a settled Habit, and so the indifferent Church-man is turn'd into a rigid and flaming Dissenter.

\* 2 Tim. iii. 7.

† 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

2. A great many are drawn into, and confirm'd in, a Separation from us, by entertaining such unsound Principles as naturally lay the Foundation of Schism. I in the least doubt not, and I take this opportunity to profess it, but that many of our Dissenters are Persons of great Honesty and Integrity; and, that in separating from us, they act according to the best Light and Information of their Minds: But I likewise doubt not, but that herein they are miserably impos'd upon by false and precarious Principles, which, tho' false and precarious, are of an equal Efficacy, with the very best, where they are received. As,

1. That Conscience is the sole Rule of Life, is an avow'd and celebrated Tenet among very many of them, the Pleas which they deem a sufficient Warrant and Authority for their Actions, and a full Answer to our clearest and exactest Reasonings. A dangerous and fatal Error! That make Conscience almost impossible, and opens a Door to the most extravagant Follies of Men! For if nothing can be so absurd as to let Conscience be the sole Rule of Life; if Perswasion must go for Conscience; and if Conscience be constituted the sole Rule of Life; I cannot see any certain Criterion left to distinguish Truth from Error, Good from Evil, but all of necessity must be resolv'd in Peoples Fancies and Opinions.

Whereas Conscience, 'tis plain, can be nothing else but the Judgment a Man makes concerning Actions, whether they be Duties, or Sins, or Indifferent; but then in order to form this Judgment some other Rule is requir'd, whereby the Rectitude or Obliquity of it must be tried; Conscience being not the Rule, but the Faculty that applies the Action to the Rule.

2. That Scripture is the only and adequate Standard of all things to be done in Religion; and that not only what is forbidden, but likewise what is not commanded, is unlawful; they think, a safe and unquestionable Maxim. This is the great Engine they play against our Ceremonies, and the very Basis and Foundation of Non-conformity.

And yet this Principle, they so much applaud themselves in, is repugnant to their own Practice in appointing fix'd Times, and Places, and Methods, for their religious Exercises; to the Example of Christ, who conform'd himself to the Ordinances of the Jewish Church, confessedly of human Institution; to the Reason and Necessity of the Thing; since



'tis not possible the publick Exercise of Religion can subsist or Uniformity be maintain'd on this Hypothesis, and without the Supposal and Allowance of Authority in the Church to define the proper Means to this End.

Things necessarily to be believ'd, and the great Laws of Life and Salvation, are fully reveal'd in Scripture; and to add too, or detract from, these, is intolerable Sacrilege and Presumption, is a Truth confess'd on all hands; but since the Scripture is in a great measure silent as to what relates to Form and Order, to the Method and Rules proper to be observ'd, in celebrating Divine Worship, and the Administration of the Keys; this becomes the proper Subject for Church Authority to regulate and determine; which Authority otherwise, would be in a manner useless and impertinent. In the Word, where God's Laws have interpos'd, there all human Authority ceaseth; but where they have not, there is room left for inferior Judicatures to act: And in such Cases, a human Law is not a Contradiction to a Divine Law, but only interposing, where there was none before.

3. Another Principle of Separation, is this; That the negligent and promiscuous Use of the Word and Sacraments in our mix'd Assemblies, renders Communion with us sinful. But, to say nothing to the Falseness of this Charge, and only to speak to the Merits of it; How doth it appear, that the Sin and Unworthiness of another, with whom I communicate, can affect me? If another Man's Faults can render communicating with him sinful, they must be either private or publick Faults. If private, What security can any one have that his own Assemblies are not as dangerous to communicate in, as ours. If publick, What way imaginable can this be conceiv'd, but only by the Scandal that such a Conduct may give to others. Let it be so then; But a Scandal is only sinful where it is active. But as to me, in communicating with such unworthy Persons the Scandal is only passive, and I must not separate my self from the Communion of the Church, or omit a known and necessary Duty, to comply with Peoples mistaken Apprehensions.

4. What I suppose to be another Ground of Separation, is this; That our Dissenters tie Salvation to what they think Truth, and Damnation to what they think Error; and therefore in Consequence of this Principle, conclude, That the Number of Churches must keep pace with the Variety of Men's Opinions; and that Separation becomes a Duty where a Church is discovered to have any Flaws in its Constitution,



faults in its Practise. A Tenet, so irreconcilable to Unity, and the present State of Things; lies so cross to Conviction, and so fraught with Mischiefs, that nothing can be more repugnant to the Nature of all Societies. All Churches must at this rate dissolve; and, as well they who assert this Principle, as they against whom 'tis levelled, will, in their turns, find the dreadful Effects of it.

The best constituted Churches in the World will always be subject to many Imperfections and Objections: Whoever looks for Perfection here, will always find himself mistaken; and, whilst he vainly aims at unallay'd Exactness, seems ignorant of one of the most obvious Properties of human Nature in this mortal and degenerate State, *\* That he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.*

I think a Man should not break the Peace of any Church wherein he can communicate without Hazard of Salvation; and I doubt not but God will be better pleas'd with his living in Unity with it, amidst all its Errors and Imperfections, than to make a Rupture and Schism for the Sake of greater Perfection. Many Errors are consistent with the Duties of Communion, and the Character of a good Man, but no Separation is justifiable, but where the Error is fundamental and damnable.

When Jesus Christ has provided a Remedy for the Oblivion of Mens Wills, which we call Sin; the Analogy of Grace will induce us to believe, that he has for the Faults of their Understanding also, which we call Error: Except we can believe what's least in their Power, should be most in their Condemnation; or that the Immorality of their Actions are less criminal, than the Mistakes of their Minds.

These, and several others that might be instanc'd in, become the unhappy Principles of Separation to very many. 'Tis no such wonder; for admit them once for true, and follow them whither they lead, and there Unity becomes impossible, since this general Mistake runs through them all; that, in Matters of Religion, the real, suppos'd, or even possible defects of a Thing, render that Thing unlawful to me; that where I can object, there I must not comply; that I may raise many Scruples as I can, but must never lay down any.

3. The great and visible Prejudices they labour under, is another undeniable Argument of those carnal Principles by which they govern themselves. As,

1. They lay down this as Matter of Fact, previous to any

\*2. Cor. viii. 2.

Proof, or rational Conviction of it, *Conformity is a Sin*. The Point in question they take for granted, as a Thing long ago settled by the Writings and Arguments of their own Party.

Here they fix their foot, and intrench themselves, and think they have a safe Retreat from all the Force and Artillery of our Arguments. Nay, but 'tis common in such Matters as distinguish one Party from another, herein they are apt to place a more than ordinary Degree of their own Merits and Excellency; to thank God that they are not as other Men are to value themselves that they dissent from, and are Enemies to, all Ceremonies and human Impositions; and to take a secret Pleasure and Satisfaction that they can give this Testimony of the Sincerity of their Hearts, that they are able to stand their ground, both against the Force of our Arguments and the Authority of our Church: Their very Dissentions like Charity, they think, will cover a Multitude of Sins; and that, their being *Abraham's Children* will answer all Objections. Hence they learn to cherish their Doubts and Scruples as Evidences of a more exalted Sanctity, and of an uncommon Zeal for God; as if, the more they hated us, and the farther and the faster they ran from us, God lov'd them the better; and that his Kingdom consisted more in Meat and Drink, *i.e.* in abstaining from Things of little Importance, than in the obtaining of it, than in Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost.

Strange and horrid Cruelty! Thus to preclude their own Enquiries, and at once to cherish their Distemper, and render it incurable!

This makes it, that nothing, how weak and trifling soever can be said in their own Defence, that has not the Honour of giving Satisfaction; nor any thing, tho' never so cogent and demonstrative, on our parts, but is either entertain'd with Scorn and Contempt; or else, if it openly flash in their Face and carries irresistible Light and Conviction with it, they screen themselves from the Force of it by this Evasion; 'Tis certainly laid to cast a Mist and Fallacy on my Understanding, and a tempting to commit a known Sin, and therefore it cannot be true.

2. This appears, in that all we have been able to say for their Satisfaction, has had no better Effect upon them.

I know no Argument that has been more labour'd, or in a better Light, than this of *Conformity* has been. All Topics and Forms of Reasoning have been tried upon them

The most skilful and impartial Hands, in the most friendly and engaging Methods, and yet they continue the same doubting and unresolved Christians, and we are but just where we were at first.

What now can be given in reason for such an unaccountable Stiffness of Opinion? Can no Argument be convincing, but from the Courtesie and Concessions of Men? Is Truth incapable of so just a Vindication, as to owe its Efficacy and Reception, not to its own native Charms and Brightness, but to their good Nature? Or are our Dissenters cast in a different Mold from other Mortals, that what convinceth all the World besides, and in which the Reformed abroad have given Judgment on our side, should not yet be able to give them Satisfaction?

Prodigious Obstinacy! But here alas! The Secret lies, they shut their Eyes against the Light; their own Anticipations lock up the Powers of their Minds, and hinder the Evidence of Truth from operating upon them; their Prejudices, I say, like inverted Prospectives, diminish the Object, and make what's in it self beautiful and charming, appear hideous and frightful to them.

3. In that they think they have acquitted themselves well in those slight and superficial Reasons they bring, for their Non-conformity to the Establish'd Church.

Was Episcopacy of so late a Date as they pretend, was a Form of Prayer unlawful, was kneeling at the Sacrament idolatrous, &c. nothing, one would think, were capable of easier and clearer Proofs: But when, instead of this, we see them take up with poor Evasions, and elusory Distinctions, with forc'd and unnatural Interpretations of Scripture, with weak and inadequate Reasons, with Arguments full of Labour and Artifice, calculated only to serve a Cause, and disengage themselves from some pinching Distress; this is as a thousand Demonstrations to me of the Weakness of their Cause, and of what violent Pre-posessions they lye under to receiv'd Tenets, which, whilst with Reason they cannot, with Obstinacy they will maintain.

4. In that they are so very apt to quarrel with, and suspect us, in whatever we say or do. To see what Loads of Calumny they throw upon us, you'd think that this poor Church, always esteemed the greatest Honour and Support, was, indeed, the greatest Blemish and Scandal, of the Reformation; and that we only wait for a fit Opportunity of revolting to Popery or Judaism again.



If we stand up for the Liberties and Authority of the Church; they accuse us of affecting a tyrannical Usurpation over God's Heritage: If we shew but a little Favour and Moderation towards them, 'tis because the Justice of their Cause extorts it from us. Thus we are urg'd with inconsistent and contradictory Reasons, and are Papists or Presbyterians, as they please. Are we strict Observers of the Rules and Orders of our Church? Why, then we are Superstitious; If a little Remiss herein, the Reason is, Interest sways us in declaring for the Church, but that we privately condemn, what we publicly profess.

Do we preach Obedience to the Civil Magistrate, and decry Rebellion and Resistance? We are then promoting an arbitrary Power, and betraying the Liberties of Mankind: Finally, Do we at any time address Authority for such Laws and Securities as may be of farther Advantage to our Constitution? This is only with a design to deprive them of theirs, to raise a persecuting Spirit against them, and to crush them the easier; and whilst pretended Dangers were the avowed Reason of our Request, secret Enmity, and destructive Intentions, against them, were the true and real Causes of it. Now what can be more peevish and unjust than this, that nothing will please them? But People who labour under strong and inveterate Prejudices think every thing good or bad according to the Tincture and Impression that is upon their own Minds.

4. A great many dissent from us on account of their Education, and long and inveterate Habits. *Sequendi nobis Parentes, qui secuti sunt feliciter suos.* They believe as ever they have believ'd, and as their Fore-fathers did before them. Custom goes for Reason and Demonstration, and whatever thwarts that, is receiv'd with Shyness and Aversion. And it cannot be denied that Custom and Education clap a strong Bias on the Judgment, and very much check the Freedom of our Thoughts. What we have always been train'd up in by Tract of Time, and immemorial Prescription, takes such fast hold of us, that the very thought of parting with old and receiv'd Opinions, hath something so shocking in it, as Nature will not, cannot, easily submit to.

There are not only practical, but intellectual Habits too; and as the one governs our Actions, so doth the other our Opinions; only with this difference, Men are generally more tenacious of erroneous Opinions, than of vicious Practices.

the Honour of their Understandings being more concern'd in the one, than in the other; and they had much rather be accounted Sinners, than Fools.

To unravel all our former Opinions which Age has made venerable, and which have hitherto govern'd our Lives; to new model our Understandings; and give a fresh Turn to all our old Modes of Thinking; to set the Bent of our Wills and Affections to a quite contrary Tendency; to quit an old Party and Cause for one wholly new, wherein all our Hopes and Fears, and the Measures of future Happiness and Misery, must run in another Channel, and are bottom'd upon different Principles, is so very hard to Flesh and Blood, that 'tis scarce possible for any, but such as have experienc'd the Difficulty, to have a just Idea of the Greatness of it.

Nothing can be a livelier Instance of the Prevalency of Education to debauch and corrupt our Reason, than St. Paul himself: Now indeed, disengag'd from the Fetters of it, his Style runs, \* *While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; Are ye not carnal?* But who would think these the Words of him, who was once the persecuting Saul; and who, out of a furious and partial Zeal for his own Sect and Religion, † *made havock of the Church, and persecuted that way unto death?* And to whatever other purpose the extraordinary Manner of his Conversion may serve, it will however furnish us with this Observation, That Notions long settled, and rivetted, in our Natures, are not to be remov'd by easie and common Methods.

This gives me the less Surprize if our Reasonings and Books for Conformity have had no better Effect upon the Generallity of our Dissenters. For when from their Cradles they have been taught to call our Bishops, Anti-christian; our Ministers, Baal's Priests; kneeling at the Sacrament, Idolatry; and the Surplice, a Rag of the Whore of Babylon; this gives them such an early Prejudice against the Church, that whatever can be said for it, or against them, is all look'd upon as Fallacy and Trick, and cheaply thrown aside.

And doubtless such Opinions, however erroneous, as People from their Infancy have been train'd up in, will, by the Mercy of God, meet with just Allowance and Consideration: Yet, I cannot but observe, that an English Dissenter will have less right to this extenuating Plea, than most other Men. It is not here as it is in Italy or Spain, where, one Religion being

\* Act. viii. 3. xxii. 4.

† Act. ix.

but allow'd of, no mention is scarce ever made of any other but under the most frightful Representations; and where the most hellish and cruel Torments, that an inexorable Inquisition can advise, are perpetually threatening him who dissents but in the least Punctilio from what they call Catholicism. Whereas, among us, there are Books, and Persons, and Laws, to inform our Dissenters better, and to enlighten their Understandings; all which, I fear, will one Day rise in bitter Judgment against them, for profiting no better from such Advantages.

5. Profit and Secular Interest have but too prevailing Influence in carrying many People into a Separation from us. Where the Love of Riches has once got the Ascendant, it proves a strong and masterly Passion, and will make every thing stoop and truckle to its Nod. It will make a Thing good or evil, true or false, for *Christ* or *Belial*; where Gain, I say, is esteemed Godliness, and is set up as the Standard of Religion.

It's not improbable, that the Heads of the Factions at *Cornth*, under the Pretence of advancing more sublime Notions, and of carrying them farther into the Mysteries of Religion, made a private Advantage on the Credulity of a vain and inquisitive People, since our Apostle in several Places of this Epistle so frequently takes notice of, and cautions against, this Trade, and Huckstering in Religion. And 'tis much to be fear'd, that a like Bartering Temper has been but too prevalent in fomenting the Divisions among ourselves. 'Tis true, indeed, the Honour, and the greatest Part of the Profit of Religion, run in another Channel: But 'tis true too, that there are those, who would make but a sorry Figure, and have but little sport on the main Stream, have yet found good Success by poaching in the Back-waters.

Some factious and popular Spirits, having any sinister Designs against Church or State, find their Accounts in cherishing our Divisions; in heading and abetting of them; in making large Contributions, and settling Funds for their Support; that so they may be sure of a bustling Party to carry on their own Ambitious Intrigues: And there are others against whatever Self-denying Principles they pretend to, lay themselves but too open to such Impressions; and, whilst they serve not our Lord *Jesus Christ*, but their own Belly, will greedily swallow the charming Bait, and go all the Lengths that will set them.



The Prospect of a good Trade, or of a rich Wife, or of some great temporal Benefit, have been often found to draw People off from our Communion; to baffle all our Arguments; and at last to make Conformity a most damnable Sin: But that any Man, whose Principles and Education have made him a Dissenter, should, for any Profits or Preferments, prevail with himself, against Principle, Honour, and Conscience, to communicate with us in the most solemn Ordinance of our Religion, and that, in the idolatrous Posture of Kneeling at it too, is, I dare be bold to say, what the dull, honest, Dissenters of former Times would have abominated; nor ought to have been credited that any Age could have produc'd such a shameful Example, if this of ours, more refin'd in such speculations, had not produc'd a Generation of Men, who, both by their Writings and Practices, have convinc'd us of the contrary, and thereby prov'd, how *\* prone People, that will be rich, are to fall into Temptation and a Snare, and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts.*

6. Having Mens Persons in Admiration, is a very powerful Motive to draw People into Separation. This seems the principal Reason of the Factions at *Corinth*, where the Eloquence, and Zeal, and specious Pretences, of the Authors of them, had so captivated the Minds of many, as to carry them off from their Obedience to an inspir'd Apostle.

A great many want Leisure and Abilities to examine Things themselves, but are govern'd purely by Example and Authority; and whoever has the knack to bribe and sooth their Passions, may carry them into the Practice and Belief of any thing; into Schism, into Treason, into Hell it self.

When the *Jews*, in the Seventh of *St. John*, † were resolv'd to shut their Eyes and Ears against the Miracles, and Divine Discourses of Christ, tho' by their own acknowledgment he spake as never Man spake, and also did the Works that none other Man did; they thought this a sufficient Vindication of their Incredulity, ‖ that not any of the Rulers and Pharisees had believed on him.

The Truth and Prevalency of this the Leaders of the Factions amongst our selves are very well apprised of, and therefore take all imaginable care to put on the brightest, and most ensnaring Forms, to study the Inclinations, and to court the Affections of their People, as well knowing what Advantages are to be made thereby.

\* 1 Tim. vi. 9.

† St. John vii.

‖ Ver. 48.

Some things are so stubborn as not to be prov'd; and some Men again are so humerous as not to be convinc'd by a bare Proof; but if a Man can so far prevail on the Wills and Affections of his People, as to trust him with the Conduct of their Understandings, and to make his own Authority the Standard of their Belief, this is an easier and shorter way to gain them, and much Pains and Hazard is avoided.

To prove that Episcopacy, Ceremonies, the Cross and Sponsors at Baptism, or Forms of Prayer, are unlawful, and condemn'd by Scripture, is no such easie matter; but if a warm and gifted Preacher, who knows how to touch the Hearts and Affections of his Auditory, shall in proper Terms tell them so, the deference that is paid to his Parts and Piety will supersede the Necessity of elaborate Reasonings, and quickly make them be so esteem'd.

To pretend an extraordinary Zeal for God and Religion to be very scrupulous in matters controverted, and of little moment; to carry the Appearance of a mortified and heavenly-minded Man; to affect a fullen and contemplative Gravity in outward Deportment, as if a Man could not be religious except he told his Steps, or measur'd the Distance between his Paces; are Methods fitted to ensnare the Affections of ignorant and unthinking People, and render Reason and Argument of little use. Hence it comes to pass, as we may frequently see, when we have spent much time and pains in debating Matters calmly and fairly with them, in forming Reasons for their Conviction, and have laid things so close together, that we think they cannot escape us; that they believe they have well enough discharged themselves of all this, by returning us the Answer that *Tully* saith the Scholars of *Pythagoras* did to those who ask'd them, *Why they believed this or that?* *Ipsæ dixit, My Teacher tells me I must believe thus:* Upon which the Orator well observes, *Tantum Opinio præjudicata præterat, ut etiam sine ratione valeret Autoritas.*

Where a stupid Fondness of, and a blind Assent to, others prevail, there Authority will carry it against Reason and Demonstration.

7. Mens sinful Corruptions, and the Love of a sensual and worldly Life; and the Aversion they have to a steady and uniform Practice of all moral Duties, have been a further Motive to carry People off from our Communion. Trade and Business, and the Pleasures of this World, and the ardent Desires Men have to take a full Draught of these, do so gratify

Corruptions, and take such fast hold of our infirm Natures, that where any provision is made to oblige Men in this Article, is sure to meet with a very kind Reception. But here it is that our most excellent Church is very defective. The Plan she goes upon is that of pure Christianity it self, which, in short, I take to be this — That Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and Mediator between God and Man: That the Benefits of his Death are universal, and intentionally reach all Mankind; That a firm Belief in him, and the Practice of all Moral Duties and Virtues, is what alone will entitle us to the Benefit of that Redemption; That, tho' unsinning Obedience is not, yet, sincere Obedience, and a striving after Perfection, is requir'd of us; That the Performance of this, so far as is necessary to Salvation, is attainable by every Man, through the Assistance of God's Holy Spirit, in the due Use and Exercise of that Reason, Liberty, and Power of Action that God hath planted in our Natures.

This is the Scheme, I say, which we go upon in our publick Ministry and Discourses to our People; but it is very unpopular, and no ways calculated to gratifie the Corruptions of the World. Hence those rude and fierce Oppositions to our Doctrines and Persons: Hence some, who love Darkness rather than Light, and had rather part with their Religion than their Lusts, have run into open Infidelity.

But the Generality of Men, unwilling wholly to quit their Interest in Religion, and their Expectations of Felicity in a future State, cannot so far master their Natures; chusing rather to go into such Methods and Principles as suit best with their present Prejudices, and give the fairest Hopes of securing Heaven, and a fuller Enjoyment of this World.

To some People, in order to avoid those Fears and Terrors of Mind which the Acknowledgment of God and Religion, under the Guilt of Sin, and an inordinate Love of this World, will unavoidably create in them; the Method of the *Roman Church* appears fair and promising, wherein the *Opus operatum* of the Sacraments, the vast Fund of Merits in their Hands, and the indulgent Distribution of them upon no very exorbitant Rates (not to mention several other of its Doctrines) procure in a great Measure the Care, and Pains, and Conflict of the Christian Life, and is the best Argument that Popery can on its side.

Others go into the Antinomian Hypothesis; Believing the Moral Precepts of the Law of no use under the Gospel;



That Good Works do not further, nor Evil Works hinder Salvation; That Christ has given us an absolute Discharge, and alone worketh, willeth, and believeth in us; That the Infusions of Grace are irresistible and instantaneous; That God loves no Man for his Holiness; and, That Sanctification is no Evidence of Justification; Than which, nothing could be said more injurious to the Christian Religion, or that open a wider door to Licentiousness.

To some the Predestinarian Scheme is most agreeable, which teacheth that God from all Eternity selected some few out of the Mass of Mankind whom he design'd for Salvation, and that all the rest, either by a positive Decree are doom'd to, or by a Preterition are left in, a State of Damnation; that for those few Elect Christ only died, and affords effectual Grace; that these Decrees are irreversible, and lay us under an absolute necessity to them.

Which Doctrines must needs slacken, or rather evacuate the Motives to Repentance and a good Life: For what Obligation can I think my self to lie under of governing my Lusts and Passions, and of pursuing the strict Rules of Virtue and Morality, when all my Prayers, and Tears, and Struggling can stand me in no stead, or my Neglect can do me no harm?

Others again are taken with the pleasing Dreams of Mystical Unions, and Divine Illuminations; with pretences to extraordinary Influxes of Light and Grace, which so sanctify, unite, and make them one with God, that Sin has henceforward no more Power over them; and that they are pure, and spotless, and amiable, in the Eyes of God.

As the several Parties of Christians amongst us go into one or other of these Opinions; so, chuse which you please, there is too great Encouragement given to human Corruption, not to render it very taking. For if either the Substitution of vicarious Obedience; or a Persuasion, that I am actually discharg'd by Christ, that all my Endeavours are rendered useless by the Fatality of any irreversible Decree, or that God is so fond of my Person as to overlook my Sin; whichsoever, I say, of these is admitted, the necessity of fighting and struggling with my own Lusts and Appetites, and of striving after personal Holiness, is thereby superseded.

Now whilst the Case stands thus, we need not wonder many, who would rather be sav'd from the Punishment, than be obliged to quit the Practice of their Sins, are willing to take Sanctuary under such indulgent Principles, as here

promise their Gratification. I believe no Man will expressly show that he embraceth this or that Hypothesis, because it gives him greater Liberties, and will let him go to Heaven his own way; yet, I in the least doubt not, but this very often is the prevailing Reason of Mens Choice, and what lies at the Bottom of their Hearts. Dress up those obliging Doctrines with what Light, and Varnish, and Disguise, you please, yet Men, whatever overt Reasons they may give for embracing of them, are not such Fools, as not to see into the just Consequences of what gratifies corrupt Nature; and tho' modesty may make them not own the Reason of their Choice, yet the strong Propension of their Appetites to the \* *Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, all that is in the World*, will powerfully incline them to make their Advantage of it.

Now from this, I think, we may reasonably conclude, not any one thing to have contributed more to increase the Number of our Sectaries, than those easie and pleasing Schemes which have been fram'd to give greater Latitude and Indulgence to a Secular Life.

I have now done with what I suppose to be the chief Reasons of our Separation; more might have been added, but these are more than enough to shew; that, notwithstanding all their vain Pretences of purer Administrations, and of relying upon us, our Dissenters are very much impos'd upon by their own false Reasonings, Prejudices, and Passions; *are in a very carnal State, and walk as Men.*

But if I am mistaken in the Grounds and Origine of our Divisions, I must then ingeniously own that I believe the blame of Schism unjustly charg'd upon them; but whenever I can perswade my self that this is true, I shall think my self oblig'd to believe these things true too, that we lie under no obligation of Obedience to our Governours in Church or State; That Schism is no Sin; That every Man may securely follow his own Fancies and Opinions; and, That there are no Principles of Unity in the Christian Church.

\* 1 John ii. 16.

CONSIDERATIONS *concerning the*  
Cure of our Church-Divisions.

S E R M O N II.

I C O R. III. 4.

*For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; Are ye not carnal?*

**I** Now come to the Fourth Member of my general Division, *viz.*

4. To consider what Remedies and Applications have been or may be, thought useful and requisite to heal our Distempers; to remove those fond and canting Distinctions, *I am of Paul; and I am of Apollos;* and, instead of such invidious Characters, may prevail with Men to *follow after things which make for Peace, and things wherewith one may edifie another.*

And here I am sensible how intricate and perplex'd an Argument I have under Consideration, Mens Prejudices and Passions being, of all things in the World, the hardest to conquer. And then again it has been observ'd by some, and I think the Observation very just; That an *English Dissenter* of all others, is most hardly wrought upon. The Commonness of Separation, and the Impunity of it, very much abate the Sense and Horror of the Fact, People being prone to believe nothing sinful, but what is punishable by human Laws and to think themselves, safe in doing, what they see Men of great Names, and great Piety, do every day before their Eyes.

Besides, Separation has now got some Years over its head and seems to lay some claim to Prescription: Antiquity indeed it cannot boast of, except, what would be no great Reputation to it, we allow it a Conformity to the Schisms of *Novatian, and Donatus.*



If we look back to the Time when the Cause of Separation first appear'd, how rude, and naked, and inartificial, was it, to what it now is? Whether Conscience, or Popery, or Resentment, or Complexion, or all together, were the first Causes of it, is not so very plain: But if it wanted an honest Extraction, so much the more Pains have been taken since to give it engaging Airs, and a strong and healthy Complexion; studied and elaborate Reasons have been fram'd to support what was begun without any: As former Principles fail'd, others have been struck, and substituted in their room, and presently made current through a whole Party: No sooner have the Champions of it been beaten out of their old Works, but new ones have been thrown up to secure the Breach, and all Approaches and suspected Places have been better guarded: Reason, Scripture, and, of late, Antiquity, are press'd into their service: Books of all sorts, devotional, doctrinal, and controversial, are in their Peoples Hands, to prevent at once the Reading of ours, and the Possibility of Conviction: But lest their going up to *Jerusalem* to Sacrifice should be a Means of turning the Hearts of the People again to the Lord, they have their Priests and their Altars; nay, they have their Martyrs and Confessors too; they have every thing necessary to strengthen and beautifie their Hypothesis, except it be Truth and Miracles.

By all which it plainly appears how difficult it is to assail such labour'd and inveterate Prejudices, and to fall into such Methods of Cure, as shall be Superiour to the Force of them.

But whatever difficulty may be apprehended in finding Remedies equal to the Strength and Age of the Disease, this ought not to deter us from attempting it, because what's a Sin, and so great a Sin in practice, the Cure and the Prevention of it, so far as we are able, will always be an important and necessary Duty on us. What I have to say for my self in discharge of it, I will humbly lay before you in these following Particulars.

- I. I will consider the several Methods already offer'd by others for the Cure of our Divisions.
- II. I will propose what to me seems proper and adviseable in the Case.
- III. I will represent to you the Engagements we lie under, supposing our Endeavours prove unsuccessful, as to our own practice.

1. I will consider the several Methods already offer'd by others for the Cure of our Divisions. And,

1. It has been propos'd by some, whether from Principle or what other Reason, I know not, to grant an unlimited Toleration to Dissenters of all Denominations; that so, if we cannot be brought to a religious Unity, we may however come to live peaceably and quietly together.

How far Civil Authority may extend in granting an Indulgence to tender Consciences, or in restraining the Establishment of the Church in the Exercise of her Power and Censures upon such as withdraw themselves from her Communion, I do not enquire: Where Parties grow too strong for Laws, and threaten the publick Safety, there is a great deal to be said in Justification of such Laws, as the Distempers of a Nation make unavoidable; of two Evils, the least must be chosen. But allowing at present the Plea of publick Peace will justify the Magistrate in granting a Toleration; yet, no human Laws will ever justify an unreasonable Separation, or make them, of whom it's justly chargeable, the less Schismatics in acceptance of it. If the Laws of God have commanded Union among Christians, and have expressly forbidden them to withdraw themselves from Church-Fellowship and Communion with one another, no subsequent Authority can reverse the Divine Decree, or alter the Nature of the Action. What is sinful by the Laws of God, will always be sinful, tho' there were ten thousand Acts of Parliament to the contrary. The Magistrate, indeed, may make Laws against Non-conformity and suspend the Penalty of them when he has done; nay, he may tie up the Church's Hands as to the Prosecution of such as are Schismatics from her Communion (how justly I know not,) but he can never, by any Indulgence, abrogate Sin, or make Schismatics not to be what, by the Laws of God, they are.

And after all, they must have a very scandalous Notion of the Unity of Christ's Catholick Church, and of the Communion of Saints, important Articles in our Creed, who fix only in the Enjoyment of Secular Peace. At this rate Church would be like Ropes of Sand; and the *Greek Church*, on this Scheme, might as well be said to live in Communion with the *Turks*.

But, whatever shew may be made of it, 'tis much to be fear'd that Peace upon such terms can never be lasting. Where Rancour, Prejudice and Ill-will, lie at the Bottom

mens Hearts; where Men have different Sentiments about the Means of obtaining the Eternal Good; where they in consequence of this, shall think themselves obliged to propagate these Sentiments; and finally where Friends and Neighbours come to be engag'd on one side or other of the question; tho' human Laws may for a while stifle what will always swim uppermost in their Thoughts, and what they will always think themselves obliged to maintain and prosecute with uncommon Warmth and Zeal; tho' outward Force and Power, I say, may for some time check the Effects of their Resentments, yet one time or other they will break out with the greater Rage and Impetuosity.

But should this never happen, and God grant it never may, what a scanty and intolerable View doth such a constrain'd Peace give us of that Gospel-Unity, describ'd to us in the Scriptures, under all those spiritual and advantageous Characters that can make it dear and valuable to a Christian.

2. Relaxations in our Constitution has been urg'd by others as a proper Means to bring our Dissenters to Reason and Unity with us. Peace indeed is a very desirable thing, the blessings of which will always be a prevailing Argument on the Minds of good Men to make them go as far as Honour and Conscience will allow in the Prosecution of it.

But then, as the Ease of tender Consciences, the closer Union of Protestants, and even the distant Prospects of Peace, move strongly one way; so, the difficulty of gaining over any considerable Numbers of our Dissenters by any Concessions less than the throwing up our Laws and Constitution; the great scandal that such a Procedure might give to some tender Consciences among our selves; and the Exposing of our Country to the Insults and Rallery of the Common Enemy; by depending too much from the Frame and Model of our Reformation; are Reasons that move strongly the other way too.

Altering National Settlements, and breaking into the Body of a Constitution, is a Matter of more Importance, than they who view things only in Speculation, or in the Lights of present Ease, or future Advantage, can easily believe. Tho' the prospect of some Good may seem very plain, yet, what Accidents may follow such Relaxations, are not so plain. 'Tis much easier to break things in pieces than to put them into good frame again; new Scruples, new Objections, may still emerge, and so the Result may be nothing but Confusion and Disorder.



Some considerable Alterations have been already made in our Liturgy and Rubricks; but the Success has no ways answered the Promises of some, or the Expectation of others. Some Conferences likewise have been held on this difficult Article; but the Conclusion was, Mens Spirits were thereby more exasperated, and they departed from one another with less Good-will, than they came together. And till our Differences, so divided are, can unite in some proper Demands, on the one side: and till we can find our own People under better Inclinations of submitting to such Alterations, on the other; I cannot see what Good, but I can easily see what Mischief may be expected from such a Method.

3. A Comprehension hath been propos'd by others as a Expedient to compose our Distempers: But then how to bottom such a Project, and how far it should extend; whether all who own the Fundamentals of the Christian Faith must be taken in, and upon what Terms; if not, whether the excluded Parties would not thereby be rendred desperate, and embroil us again; whether our own Friends may be dispos'd to submit to such a Remedy, as may be thought, in the End, will prove worse than the Disease; whether the genuine Notice of Catholick-Union, and the Judgment of the purest Ages, which by no means ought to be departed from, will compose with this Hypothesis, are all such puzzling Difficulties, as are not easily resolv'd: And, I much fear, should any thing of this Nature be attempted whilst our Prejudices are so keen and opposite, and our Minds so indispos'd, it might prove fatal and destructive to both; and, in the Unkindness and Consequences of it, a little resemble the Cruelty of *Nazentius* in binding the Bodies of living and dead Men together.

I cannot be in their Opinion, who suppose Church-Union to consist only in an Union of Hearts and Affections, yet this I am truly perswaded of, that where they are wanting, no Union can be firm and lasting.

Whilst People of jarring and irreconcilable Principles are kept apart, common Charity, or want of Opportunity, may keep them in some tolerable order, but where, like the Beasts in the Ark, the Tame and the Salvage, the Clean and the Unclean, are all crowded under one Roof, nothing less than another Miracle will do it.

4. Reason and Argument have been laid out thick upon our Dissenters, in hopes of meeting with their Scruples, and giving Satisfaction. But alas! violent Passions and Prejudices

have prov'd too hard for Truth it self. Nothing, one would think, could be more proper and engaging, than to endeavour the Conviction of reasonable Creatures in a Method so friendly to Nature; but our best Performances have hitherto prov'd unsuccessful.

Our Reasons and Arguments for Conformity have been brought up to their full Force, and touch'd with all that Beauty and Light, nay, Tendernefs and Compassion too, that human Productions are capable of; insomuch that nothing now seems left for Posterity to add, except our Dissenting Brethren should once more think fit to shift their Principles, in pity to a routed Argument, and to keep themselves in Countenance, and others in Employment. In the mean time, would an Appeal to the whole impartial World determine the Persuasions of Mens Minds to that side where the Advantage of good Reasoning, and of a good Cause, beyond all Comparison, lie; we might safely venture the whole Stress of our Cause upon that issue: And it will for ever be the Pity and Wonder of good Men, that all those noble Discourses, written with such Temper and Exactness for the Cure of an unreasonable Separation, should only serve to load it with Condemnation, and eternal Reproach.

Books have only begotten Books; and the Endeavours of mending old Disputes have given birth to new ones. Peoples Judgments by a kind of an Antiperistasis, have been blinded by the very Means of Information; and when we expected an ingenious Submission to Reason, those reasonable Methods we look for Mens Satisfaction have been so entertain'd, as if they were not design'd to *send Peace on Earth, but a Sword.*

It would be hard to account for such a prodigious Obstinacy, did we not daily see, that as Conquests of all kinds have ever appear'd odious; so, to some Men, such is the foolish pride of Nature, none more, than those which pretend to triumph over their Opinions. To quit a Tenet they have once espous'd, carries a secret Acknowledgment in it, they think, that once they were not so good and wise as they ought to have been; and therefore by some shift or other they will wind themselves out of the clearest Demonstration, rather than be, as it were, forc'd and cudgell'd into Truth.

But then, and it cannot be denied, there have been some miscarriages on our side too on this account; sometimes, by the Unskilfulness of the Undertaker, which, whenever that happens, wonderfully revives a drooping Cause, and diffuseth

fresh Courage and Life through a whole Party: Sometimes again, by proud and insulting, by railing and provoking Reflections, mixt with good Sense and Reasoning, since the one will be sure to do ten times more hurt, than the other will do good.

He that would bring another Man over to his Opinion, must take care not to ruffle and irritate his Passions; otherwise, he destroys the Force of all his own Reasonings, by discomposing those Faculties which should judge of them. Nay, was an Angel from Heaven to use reviling and opprobrious Language in a Debate, the Tongue of an Angel, so dispos'd, would not prevail.

And indeed a Man cannot ordinarily do Error greater service than to shew himself unreasonably bitter against it, which will always get ground in proportion to such wrong Measures as are taken to repress it. Laughter or Revenge, may be the Effect of ill Treatment, but Conviction never. Men's Minds are too much diverted from the Force of the brightest Reasonings, where they meet with personal Injuries to employ them, which will always have the first place in their Considerations, whatever becomes of Truth. Give me leave to add, that if either side had a Right to be out of Humour 'tis much more excusable in a weak and suffering Party than in us. Those who are undermost may be allowed to be a little Peevish, and to vent their Resentments with more freedom; but where the Advantage is certain and conspicuous, there nothing but sound Reason, and gentle Treatment, should be used. 'Tis generous and great to treat an inferiour with Respect, and certainly then without Contumely and Reproach; and tho' good Sense, and good Usage, may not always; yet Heat, and Passion, and Reflection, will never do good on a British Constitution.

5. Force and penal Sanctions, where softer Methods will not do, have been contended for, as proper Means to break the Factions, and to dissipate the Causes of our Divisions.

How far Civil Authority, where any particular Form of Religion is taken into the Constitution, may justly make Non-conformity to it punishable, is not my Business to enquire; but to do this as a proper Means to serve Religion, or to bring Men off from their Errors, is, what I believe, agreeable neither to Scripture nor Reason.

Our Blessed Saviour made his Church a Society under proper Governours, and therefore must be suppos'd to involve



them with Authority sufficient for the Administration and Preservation of it: But 'tis very observable that whereas in other matters he left things, in a great measure, to the Prudence of the Governours of his Church; in the Points of Faith and Punishments, thought fit to prescribe the Laws and Measures of them himself: In the one Case, he only could do it, because he only knew what we ought to believe; in the other, he too well \* *knew what was in Man*, to trust him. Thus we nowhere find him to have given any other Authority to his Church for punishing Offenders, or for reclaiming the Erroneous, but what's express'd by Exhortation, Reproof, or Exclusion from the Communion and Privileges of the Faithful; which is a Demonstration to me that no other were intended by him, or are lawful to us.

He would have Religion, which is a reasonable Service, serv'd only in human and reasonable ways, such as at once may make the World believe, and love his Institutions. And if, in some extraordinary Cases, the Apostles, endowed with extraordinary Powers, thought fit to inflict extraordinary Punishments on Mens Bodies, I think this no sufficient Warrant and Authority to us, 'till the same Powers and Emergencies return again into the Church.

I in Charity hope that the far greatest Part of our Dissenters are carried into a Separation from us through Errors of Judgment, this being the best Excuse they can make for it to God or Man; but how Secular Punishments should make Episcopacy, or kneeling at the Sacrament, appear lawful to a wrong inform'd Conscience; how Fines or Goals are fitted to rectifie Peoples Apprehensions in the Business of Ceremonies, or of a Form of Prayer, I profess my self not to understand. 'Tis a sad thing our Dissenters should, upon such weak and unjustifiable Reasons, voluntarily throw themselves out of the Catholick Church, (for so I suppose them to do, who causelily withdraw themselves from the Communion of any sound part of it,) but to force and drive them into it again, as Men to Beasts into their Stalls, with Goads and Whips; or to drag them to Church, as the *Spaniards* did the poor *Indians* to Baptism, may indeed make them Conformists, but at the same time it must needs make them much worse Christians than they were before.

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\* St. John ii. 25.

Human Nature loves not to be so dealt withal, which is best pleas'd with soft and friendly Methods, whilst rigour and severity will create an Aversion to the best Cause on Earth.

The Use of Force, People will believe, generally succeeds the Want of Reason; and is apt to put an ill-natur'd World in mind of that impotent Folly and Weakness of the Jews, who when they could not answer our Saviour's Arguments, took up Stones to cast at him.

We justly abhor the Church of *Rome* for her Cruelties; and Transubstantiation scarce gives us a stronger Idea of the great Degeneracy of it, than the unrelenting Severities of the Holy Inquisition, and the unanswerable Arguments of Apostolical Dragoons, have done. Well! But must we for ever stand at this uncharitable Distance? Are there no Hopes of closing the unhappy Breaches of this excellent Church? It would be no difficult matter indeed to do it, could Men be brought to calm and peaceable Dispositions: But this is a Temper so corrupt an Age gives little Prospect of; human Laws, and human Reasonings, have not been able to effect it.

But then could a Way be found to make the Dissenters their own Physicians; could we hit upon such Reasons and Mediums wherein they must acquiesce, unless they will renounce their Christianity; and which, being admitted, are sufficient to answer all their Doubts and Scruples, I then perswade myself, we might hope to see our Differences remov'd, and this afflicted Church a *Praise in the Earth*.

Now, I suppose, the Holy Scriptures are what will answer all these Ends; and, in the Examples, Precepts, and Principles therein recorded, are sufficient, abundantly sufficient, to adjust whatever is in dispute between us and our Dissenting Brethren. And surely while they pretend so great a Love to Christ and his Commands; to adhere so steadily to the sacred Text; to model their Government, Discipline, and Worship, to the Scripture Age; that so often, and loudly, have charg'd us with unlawful Impositions, and unscriptural Practices; cannot, must not, deny this to be a fair and equal Method, to try on which side Truth and Reason lie, and to remove those unhappy Grounds of Distinction, which, to the great Scandal of our common Christianity, and the great Detriment of all our, both religious and civil Interests, keep us at so great a distance from one another. And so I come,

2. To propose what I think proper and adviseable in the Case: In doing of which, I will wholly confine my Thoughts

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what Light and Assistance the Scripture will afford. I cannot be so particular as the Nature of a just Discourse, and the Importance of the Subject, require; and therefore I must content my self with pointing only to such Reasons as may be drawn from thence to determine this Debate: yet so, I hope, may appear sufficient to evacuate the Principles of the present Separation, and to resolve the Questions agitated betwixt us.

Now,  
1. That Men are not left to their own loose and vagrant Opinions; that they are bound up by some Rules and Laws; and that they are obliged to Communion as Members of some Church; may be fairly argued from those pathetical Exhortations to Peace and Unity we every where meet with in Scripture, not only in Relation to our private, or civil, Concernments, but also as we are Professors of a common Religion, and are, or ought to be, Members of one Church: \* *If there be any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort in Love, if any Fellowship in the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies, be ye like-minded. † I beseech you Brethren by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that there be no Divisions amongst you. || The God of Patience and Consolation grant you to be like-minded to one another according to Jesus Christ. \*\* As far as it is possible, and as much as in you lies, live peaceably with all Men. †† Follow after things that make for Peace. |||| Let us walk by the same Rule; and let us mind the same Thing. \* Stand fast in one Spirit, in one mind, striving together for the Faith of the Gospel:* This is farther evident from those black and horrid Characters that are therein given us of Enmity and Divisions; from the greatfulness of Schism; and the dreadful Punishment and vengeance denounc'd against it: † *If there be Envying, and Strife, and Divisions among you; Are ye not carnal and walk as beasts? || If ye bite and devour one another, take heed ye be not consumed one of another. \*\* Where Envying and Strife is, there is Confusion, and every evil Work. †† Mark them which cause Divisions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.* And when our Apostle gives us a catalogue of damning Sins, he reckons Seditions and Heresies amongst them; ||| Now Heresies is the Word commonly made use of in Scripture to denote what we now call Schism.

Phil. ii. 1, 2. † 1 Cor. i. 10. || Rom. xv. 5. \*\* Rom. xii. 18.  
Rom. xiv. 19. |||| Phil. iii. 16. \* Phil. i. 27. † 1 Cor. iii. 3.  
Gal. v. 15. \*\* Jam. iii. 16. †† Rom. xvi. 17. ||| Gal. v. 20.

Now



Now from these patheticall Exhortations to Unity, and severe Cautions against Division, thus much is certain, that the one is a Duty, and the other a Sin; and likewise, that there are such establish'd Societies of Christians under proper Governours, and Laws of Communion, where that Duty, or that Sin, may be exemplified. But,

2. Lest People, ignorant of the Nature and Extent of Christian Unity, might not improve so well from general Exhortations, *St. Paul* gives us a full and perfect Draught of it, under all its severall Views and Obligations; by being united in one common Bond of Faith; by being Heirs of the same Promises, and actuated by the same Spirit; by participating of the same Priviledges of Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship; and by living under the same Laws, and the same Governours.

As then Church-Unity is founded on external, as well as internal Reasons; and as the Manifestation of our external Unity must necessarily be by external and visible Acts, by living under the same Rules, and by acknowledging the same Pastors; so must the repeated Exhortations to Unity, so frequent in Scripture, be understood to relate to Unity in the external Polity of it, as well as to that which results from the internal Frame and Structure of the Christian Church.

But then, as Rites, and Ceremonies, and Modes of Worship, are in their Nature alterable, and are often actually abrogated, or chang'd for others, but the Priesthood, or Pastorate perpetual, and uniform; the visible Unity of Church Communion is then the best express'd, when we continue in Union with, and Obedience to, our Spiritual Guides, in the Use and Observation of those Ordinances which they have appointed. And this is that, wherein the Unity of particular Churches doth principally consist. For as Baptism, and the Profession of the true Faith, make us Members of the Catholic Church; so Baptism, and the Profession of the true Faith, joined with our living in Communion with the Governours of those respective Churches whereunto we belong, make us Members of such particular Churches: And so long as we continue united to them, in the Practice and Observance of their lawful Commands and Injunctions, so long, and no longer, we maintain the Unity of the Church.

To this purpose we are commanded to obey our Spiritual Guides, as being the great Bonds and Ligaments of the visible and external Unity.

Under the Law, the whole Jewish Nation had but one Rule of Faith, one Form of Worship, and one Order of Men to officiate in Holy Things: If any but these invaded the Office of the Priesthood, ( without God's special Appointment and Designation ) their Sacrilege met with exemplary and con- siderable Punishment.

Union with, and Obedience to, these, was strictly requir'd by the Law. \* *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Ask the Priests concerning the Law. † Hearken to the Priest, that standeth to minister before the Lord thy God; || and to the Levites, \*\* that teach the good Knowledge of the Lord.* And our Sayiour recognizeth their Authority, and enforceth Obedience to them; † *The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses's Seat; all therefore whatsoever ( the Expression is emphatical, ) they bid you observe, that observe and do.* And when he Cures some whom their legal Impurities had depriv'd of the Communion of the Temple; as if the Benefit of the Cure lay more in being re-admitted into the || Bosom and Unity of the Church, than in the Restitution of Health, he adds, ( tho' his *jus Propheticum* might have dispens'd with such an Order, ) † *Go shew thy self to the Priest.*

Under the New Law, the Precepts of Obedience to the Pastors and Governours of the Church are very particular and express. || *We beseech you Brethren to know them which Labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. Remember them which have the Rule over you; who have spoken to you the Word of God; whose Faith follow. Obey them which have the Rule over you, and submit your selves. †† Submit your selves unto such as have addicted themselves to the Ministry of the Gospel, and to every one that helpeth with them and laboureth.* And our Apostle in his Epistle to Timothy tells us, and one would think he spake prophetically of this factious and licentious Age, || *The time will come, when Men will not endure sound Doctrine, but after their own Lusts will heap to themselves Teachers, having itching Ears.* Sound Doctrine and lawful Pastors are the great Preservatives of each other; so that when Men once forsake these, 'tis no wonder then if their Divisions keep pace with their Practices, and they \* *are brought into Fables.*

Hag. ii. 11. † Deut. xvii. 12. || Deut. xvii. 9, 10. \*\* 2 Chr. xxx. 22. Mat. xxiii. 2, 3. || Mat. viii. 4. \* Mark i. 44. † Luke v. 14. 17. 14. Thess. v. 12. \*\* Heb. xiii. 7, 17. †† 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. || 2 Tim. iv. 3. 1 Cor. 4.

I conclude therefore, that to depart from the Communion and Obedience of our lawful Pastors, without lawful and justifiable Reason, is breaking the Unity of the Church in one important Instance of it, and contrary to those Obligations which the Scriptures lay upon us.

But all Church Governours being fallible Men, and such may deceive others, or be deceived themselves; we are not blindly to embrace whatever they obtrude upon us, but may, nay, 'tis our Duty, and we must, in some Cases, withdraw our Obedience from them.

3. That then the Nature of true Religion might not be mistaken; That Christians might not mis-employ their Zeal in the Object, or Degree, of it; That they might not enterprize on the Church's Peace for weak and inadequate Reasons; That they might know when to break Communion, and when not; great Care is taken to settle Mens Judgments in this critical Point.

Now any one that carefully attends to the Drift and Design of the Holy Scriptures, will plainly perceive, that the main End of the Christian Religion, is to bring us to a heavenly Frame and Temper of Mind; to make us like God, and Partakers of his Divine Nature, and to cultivate in us the Blessed \* *Fruits of the Spirit, which are in all Goodness, and Righteousness, and Truth.*

Moral and substantial Virtues are the main Hinges on which Religion turns; whilst Rites, and Ceremonies, and the instituted Parts of Religion, are of little Value in the Eyes of God; nay, are often laid aside, when they come in Competition with the former; and, comparatively speaking, are sometimes reputed Evil. So little stress doth God lay upon those things, for which some Men will not stick to tear the Church in pieces, and embroil the World.

† *Go ye and learn, saith Christ, what that meaneth I have Mercy, and not Sacrifice.* || *The Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost; and he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of Men.* \*\* *Neither Circumcision availeth anything, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature,* saith St. Paul. And the same Apostle throughout the 14th, and in Part of the 15th Chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, is very large on this Article.

\* Eph. v. 9. † Mat. ix. 13. || Rom. xiv. 17, 18. \*\* Gal. vi. 15.



He there tells his *Romans*, that, supposing they were of different Judgments as to the Use and Obligation of Meats and Drinks, *i. e.* of indifferent Things, they ought not, however, to censure and condemn one another for them; that the Fortunes of their Souls roll'd not on such trivial Matters; that every one ought to content himself with the full Perswasion of his own Mind, without the thoughts of bringing all others over to his Opinion; and then concludes his Discourse, as he had begun it, that, notwithstanding their different Sentiments about lesser Matters, *They should receive one another.* By which Expression we must not so understand the Apostle, as if thereby he intended to give a Rule of mutual Forbearance as to the Liberty of different Communions; but that they should be of the same Communion, tho' their Perswasions, about indifferent Things, were different. And that this is the genuine Sense of the Apostle about Indifferents, seems evident from those memorable Words of his, *Chap. vi. 17. Mark them which cause Divisions and Offences contrary to the Doctrine ye have learn'd, and avoid them.* The Words certainly relate to his former Argument about indifferent Things, and by them he flatly condemns Separation on that account.

Now if we attend to the Scope of the Apostles Reasonings, they will furnish us with these Two useful Observations.

1. That our Justification and Acceptance with God depending only on the moral and substantial Duties of Religion, to imagine that the lesser Forms of instituted Religion, tho' they may be useful in their proper Order, yet being of no Use when separated from the other; to imagine then, I say, that the Practice or Omission of these will recommend us to God, affect our Salvation, or that the Church's Peace may be violated for them, is plainly repugnant to the Design and Genius of the Christian Religion, and to that Rate and Order of Things wherein they are plac'd by Christ and his Apostles: consequently therefore for Christians to break Communion with Christians, for Rites and Ceremonies, where no proper Virtue or Holiness is lodged in them, and, for that Reason, not be suppos'd to constitute new Parts of Divine Worship; equally by such scrupulous Omissions, to fall into that very Superstition which is unjustly charg'd on us; it being alike Superstitious, to believe the forbearing some Things, void of Moral Evil, or any Divine Command, should be pleasing and acceptable to God, as to believe the Performance of them

should

should be so, since the Nature and Degree of Superstition is the same in both Cases.

2. That 'tis the Apostle's Intentions to carry People beyond their Doubts and Scruples about these things: for he manifestly lays the Foundation of Unity and Church-Communion on higher and more important Considerations; and binds it on Mens Consciences by the great Obligations of Peace, and Publick Good, and requires they should go *\* as far as possible, and as much as in them lies*, in pursuance of them: *As far as possible, and as much as in them lies*; Pray, How far is that? Till People are pleas'd to clog their Obedience with weak and groundless, not to say, with studied and artificial, Objections? No certainly, for this had been saying nothing at all; but, till pure, and palpable, and unsophisticated Sin stop their further Progress. There, Duty to God and themselves, oblige them to make a Stand. But to think that the Doubts and Scruples of Mens Minds; which many times are only other Names for Fancy and Opinion, should be the Boundaries and Arbiters of the Church's Peace, is neither to know the Use of Charity, nor the Laws of Society, nor the Scope and Reasonings of the Scripture; It's venturing upon an Action, of the last Importance, if we are mistaken, for the sake of what is commonly of no great Moment if we are not; 'tis gratifying our Scruples with the Hazard of our Souls; and, of two Evils, to chuse the greatest.

4. But suppose the Differences amongst Christians be about weightier Matters than Meats, and Drinks, and Days; must Christians divide upon it? Must a new Ministry, new Altars, and separate Congregations for religious Worship, be erected? Why, our Apostle is very express here too, and plainly delivers himself against Separation.

Some of the Controversies between the Jewish and Gentile Converts were of this Nature: They both held the Foundation, that Jesus was the Messiah; but they differ'd about the Perpetuity and Obligation, the Efficacy and Ends, of the Mosaick Law; as, Whether the Gentile Christians should observe the Law or not; Whether Justification was by the Works of that, or by the Faith of Jesus Christ; Whether conversion with idolatrous Heathens, and eating of their Sacrifices, were justifiable; Whether the paying some Divine Worship to Angels, because the *† Law was given by the Disposition of them*

\* Rom. xii. 18.

† Col. ii. 18. with Acts vii. 53.

was lawful: These Differences continued long, and spread wide; were not about the Rites and Ceremonies, and the Instruments and Means of Religion; but about some very important Articles, and such as affected the Body of Religion.

The Heats they fell into upon this Occasion, produc'd such a Shyness and Aversion betwixt them, that they withdrew from ordinary and familiar Conversation with one another, and some great Apostles weakly gave into the Humours then on foot; but whether they actually divided into separate Assemblies at *Antioch* or *Philippi*, is not so plain: But let this be as it will, *St. Paul's* Authority is good against those who did, or those who should divide, for these or the like Reasons; who gives them and the World this decisive Rule as to Church-Communion in those, and in all other parallel Cases; *Nevertheless, wherunto ye have already obtain'd, let us walk by the same Rule, let us mind the same Thing.*

By which Words he plainly contends for such an Uniformity of Practice, as consists in the Observation of the same standing Rule; not that they should separate for what they differ'd about, but hold Communion for what they were agreed in; that, if in controverted Points they could not arrive at an Uniformity of Opinions, they were, however, bound in Duty and Conscience to go as far as they could in Practice; that Differences of Judgment should be over-ruled by the Obligations of Peace; and that, finally, they should hold constant Communion, where they did fundamentally agree; contenting themselves as to the Doctrines about which they differ'd, in-waiting on the Teachings and Goodness of God for Satisfaction; who, while they waited for it in the Ways of Peace, would either find a way to do it, or would not finally condemn them for their Errors.

Would you now enquire how our Dissenters have conform'd themselves to this Rule? Why thus, They agree with us in the Substantials of Religion; they allow Salvation in our Church; and, upon proper Occasions, can Communicate with us; and yet, contrary to this Apostolick Canon, they separate from us on weaker Reasons, than those Christians, to whom *St. Paul* would not allow Separation, did, or might have done, from one another: The Apostle labours to settle a Uniformity of Practice among People of different Perswasions; but our Dissenters argue just the backward way;



namely, where Opinions in Religion are different, there Communion must be so too; and thus instead of closing the Wounds of the Church, they endeavour to propagate an eternal Schism.

5. But then, seeing Defects and Abuses, Scandals and Corruptions, will unavoidably mingle themselves with all human Constitutions; that the Purity of Religion might not be too much endanger'd, or the Peace and Unity of the Church be broken by weak, but well-meaning Christians, on that account; Christ hath in Mercy thought fit to lodge a Power in his Church to reform Abuses, to repress the insolent Attempts of daring Offenders, and cut off the Obstinate and Incurable from the Peace and Communion of his Church.

But then this Power, and the Exercise of it, he left not to private Christians, or any Combinations of them, but to the Guides and Pastors of his Flock; a Remedy being thereby provided against the former Evils, and, consequently, the Occasions of Schism superseded: Inasmuch that every private Christian may now argue thus with himself; What Faults or Scandals so ever may be in the Church whereof I am a Member, as long as nothing capitally Evil, or immediately Destructive of Salvation, is impos'd upon me; Whilst the Reformation of Abuses, and the Correction of Scandal, is by Divine Appointment, their Province; and, without due Care and Application in the Discharge of it, will certainly become their Guilt; I, who am a private Christian, as I am not, cannot be, responsible to God for any thing but my own Conduct, so I must not separate for such Faults and Scandals as are inseparable from all human Persons and Constitutions, because I must not confound the Order of Things, usurp on the Authority of others, or loosen the Bands of the Church's Unity.

6. If we consider next the Faults and Corruptions of the Apostolick Churches mentioned in Scripture, so far as they are the same, or bear an Analogy to those, for which our Dissenting Brethren renounce Communion with us, so far we shall have another Argument against the Reasonableness of the present Separation.

\* The Churches of *Ephesus*, *Smyrna*, *Pergamos*, *Thyatira*, and *Sardis*, are expressly noted by St. John as faulty and corrupt Churches; as likewise those of *Rome*, *Coloss*, and *Gala-*

there were by St. Paul; yet these Churches, because they kept the Faith of Christ, are still called the Churches of God.

Calvin, who cannot be suspected of Partiality, having asserted that Men ought not to separate from a Church which has the true Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, tho' some Faults about Preaching the Word, and the Administration of the Sacraments may be retained, at large proves what great Allowances are to be made, as to several Corruptions, from the Example of the Apostolick Churches; and he saith, Mens Moroseness in these Matters, altho' it seems to flow from Zeal, yet that it much rather comes from spiritual Pride, and a false Opinion of their own Holiness above others.

And truly we do not find, either that the Members of the said Churches renounc'd Communion with one another because of such Corruptions, (and they were as great as any amongst our selves,) or were encourag'd by the Apostles so to do, as certainly they ought to have been, if the Principles, maintain'd and practis'd by our Separatists, are justifiable.

But, on the contrary, we find the Apostles, by Promises and Threatnings, by Precepts and wholesome Laws, checking their intemperate Heats, and endeavouring all they could to keep Peace and Concord amongst them. This gives us a very different Idea of the Obligations we lie under to Peace and Unity, from what we meet with among those, who make them run parallel to the Purity and Perfection of Churches; bottoming them on this deceitful Principle, That all religious Errors being in themselves damnable, every Man is bound in Conscience not to communicate where he meets with any. 'Tis true, no Man ought to communicate with any Church in its Errors, but 'tis very true too, a Man may communicate with an erroneous Church; because in many Cases, he can do that without Sin, and where that can be done, he cannot separate without Schism.

But the Church of *Corinth* will afford us a very particular Argument against that Standard by which our Dissenters measure the Lawfulness, or Unlawfulness, of Church-Communion.

This Church of *Corinth* lay under great Disorders, was vexed with very grievous Contentions; there were many in who had not the Knowledge of God, err'd in some Points about the Resurrection, came drunk to the Lord's Table, were Fornicators, unclean and contentious Persons; who, not only ate things offered to Idols, but regal'd themselves on the Victims in the Idol's Temple; yet, for all this, no actual, or formal Schism ensued.

What!

What! Not for Errors about the Resurrection, for Symbolizing with idolatrous Heathens, or the Profanation of the Blessed Sacrament! No, not even for these it seems, so far as we can judge of the Truth of a Thing from the Conduct and Example of that Church.

But had Separation from the Communion of such scandalous and erroneous Professors, been the Duty of the more perfect and advanc'd Christians at *Corinth*, and they, through Ignorance or Neglect, had omitted it; our Apostle acted the Part of a very unfaithful Guide, not to inform their Ignorance or reprove their Neglect. No, he, good Man! it seems was himself ignorant of the refining Principles of this pure Age; he was altogether in the other Extream; not one Word drops from his Mouth to authorize such a Manner, the whole Current of his Discourse running strongly another way. He found them indeed form'd into Parties, and ready, as it were for a formal Schism; but he flatly tells them, This was not, as they foolishly imagin'd, an Evidence of their Wisdom or Piety, but a plain Token of their great Carnality; *While on faith, I am of Paul, &c.*

He doth all that a wise and good Man could do, to reduce them to calm, and peaceable, and sober Tempers: One he blames for an offensive Use of his Liberty; another for his Weakness, and unnecessary Scruples; one, for giving Offence another, for taking it; this Man he rebukes for his Immorality; the other for his intemperate Zeal: Sometimes he Reasons, then he Chides, presently he Exhorts them to Unity and Peace, from all those Reasons which are most moving to the human Nature.

There is one thing very visible and remarkable through the whole Conduct of our Apostle with these Christians; that tho' he was perfectly well appris'd of the Nature and Consequences of all the Errors and Corruptions they labour'd under, he plainly discovers a far greater Concern upon his Mind to prevent a Schism, on account of their Errors, and the Variety of their Opinions, than to remove their Errors, or reconcile their Opinions. He very well knew Schism to be more dangerous to the Church and Religion, than the Questions they wrangled about, could be to their Souls; He knew, I say, that Christians might be of different Sentiments, without being of different Churches; that they might celebrate the Mysteries of Religion, and praise God with one Heart, and one Mouth, tho' they could not reconcile their Opinions to



those of other Mens; nor these again, in all respects, to the Truth and Standard of the Christian Doctrine.

7. That the Principles of the present Separation have no Support from Scripture, and consequently are in themselves unjustifiable, is evident from hence, in that the Holy Scripture, enumerating the several Reasons for which Christians may break Communion with Christians, are wholly silent as to these, for which our Dissenters break with us. Now the Reasons to be collected from thence for which Separation is allowable, are

1. When a Church falls into Idolatry: For thus our Apostle commands the *Corinthians* in respect of the Heathen Idolaters; and all Christians in respect of such Churches, where idolatrous Practices are maintain'd; \* *Come out from among them, and be ye separate.*

2. If a Church teacheth Doctrines leading to Immorality, or such as are Destructive of the Fundamentals of Religion: Thus the same Apostle commands his Son *Timothy* to shun him who denied the Resurrection, and a future Judgment, *For their Words will eat as doth a Canker.*

3. If any Church refuseth us her Communion, unless we will do something in it self sinful; || *We must not do Evil that Good may come of it.*

If a Church is in a State of Schism, then the Rule is; \* *Mark them which cause Divisions and Offences contrary to the doctrine ye have learn'd, and avoid them.*

These being all the Cases, as some †† learned Men have observ'd, wherein Separation is allow'd by Scripture, it will be a high Presumption in us to frame more of our own Heads, being a known, and an approv'd, Maxim of Law; That where a Law commands something, and particularly excepts some Cases wherein that Law doth not oblige, in all Cases not excepted, the Law binds more strongly.

If then our Church falls under none of those Conditions allow'd by Scripture for Separation; commands or practiseth nothing idolatrous in her Worship; teacheth nothing contrary to a holy Life, or the Principles of natural, or reveal'd, Religion; imposeth nothing sinful as a Law of her Communion; or is in a State of Schism from any sound Part of the Catholic Church, which are all the allow'd Cases I meet with in

\* 2 Cor. vi. 17. † 2 Tim. ii. 17. || Rom. iii. 8. \*\* Rom. xvi. 17, 4.  
Bishop Stillingsfleet, Mr. Wall.

Scripture for Separation, we have then an unanswerable Argument against the present Separation, and which our Dissenters, with all their Wit and Metaphysicks, will never be able to get over. But,

8. Since the Appeal is now made to Scripture; Pray What Proof, what Authority, can they produce from thence to justify themselves to God, and the World, in a Matter of such vast Concernment as Separation is?

The proper Subject of human Legislation, are things indifferent: When then our Church, in the Exercise of this Power, commands or prohibits some Things, or Actions, in Nature indifferent; we think it a sufficient Justification of her Proceedings, that they are conformable to the general Precepts of Decency, Order, and Edification; and no where expressly, or by just Consequence, forbidden: But when People presume to withdraw themselves from Obedience to their lawful Governours, to refuse Submission to their Commands and to charge the Law with Iniquity; the Case is then altered, it not being enough to argue negatively; Such or such things are no where commanded in Scripture, therefore they are unlawful: But they must argue positively; They are actually prohibited, and therefore they are Sins.

When People undertake to arraign the Constitution of our Church, and to divide upon it, the Reasons and Authorities they alledge for so doing ought to be very plain, pertinent and conclusive. Schism is plainly forbidden, and made damnable in Scripture, and therefore when they separate from us, the Proof they bring in Justification of themselves must be grounded on the same Divine Authority, and ought at the least, to be as plain, as the Prohibition of that uncomfortable and detestable Sin.

But where are the plain Authorities that can justify our Dissenters in Point of Conscience for separating from the Establish'd Church? Where is it said, a Form of Prayer, or mixt Communions, or commanding the Use of indifferent Things in the Worship of God, are unlawful? What Proof to shew that Want of Discipline, that better Means of Edification, that the Imperfections or Corruptions of a Church where the Foundation is safe, will authorize their departure from its Communion? Can they as well prove the Reasons of their Separation justifiable, and that we are justly chargeable with them, as we can prove Schism a most damnable Sin? Yet, this is no more than they should be able to do, before

the Peril of their Souls, the Prejudice of the Church, and the Scandal of Religion; they venture on so bold and daring a sin.

I know indeed, that in reasoning the Point of Conformity with us, they abound in Scripture-Quotations, and wonderfully overcharge their Arguments from thence: But I appeal to the Sense of Mankind, Whether they are as pertinent and conclusive as the Consequences of their Separation require; Whether we have not given full and rational Solutions to all they have alledg'd; Whether the Inferences they draw from thence are not strain'd, and too remote, resulting from their own artificial Glosses, and Scholastick Distinctions; And, finally, whether such uncertain Reasonings can justify them in the Opinions of wise and good Men, in venturing upon an Action, the Consequences whereof, if they are mistaken, must needs prove ruinous and fatal to them.

But supposing, at present, and they need not be piqu'd at such a Supposition, that the Ballance of Scripture hung equal between us, and that the Reasonings from thence on both sides seem'd charg'd with equal Probabilities; yet, since we are settled on the same Basis with the Church for fifteen Centuries after Christ; Since we are still on the same Foot with those who first reform'd Religion amongst us, and then died for the Reformation; Since the Civil Power and Constitution is on our side; All these Considerations add great Weight to an Opinion probably grounded on Scripture, but should make them tremble who Enterprize against all these Obligations, and where the Opinion also is but equally probable.

When we broke with the Church of *Rome*, as it was upon great and weighty Reasons; The incommunicable Worship of God, The mediatorial Office of Christ, The Institution of the Holy Sacrament, &c. So, the Authorities we brought for so doing were so very plain, that the Being of God, the Immortality of the Soul, or a future Judgment, cannot be plainier. But for the Dissenters to leave us for such poor things as Rites, and Forms, and Ceremonies, things that can no ways affect their Salvation; and when the Authority alledg'd for so doing is at least disputable and dubious, but the Consequences if they are mistaken, damnable; seems to be the greatest Folly that ever any People, who pretended to tender Consciences, can be guilty of.

But I revoke my Supposition, and do affirm, That the Scripture is clearly on our side, as for the Reasons already alledg'd, so



9. In that the Examples of Christ and his Apostles in their Communion with the *Jewish Church*, do plainly evacuate the Pretences wherewith the Dissenters endeavour to Support their Separation. 'And I the rather insist on this, because their Precepts and Practices were not dissonant to one another; and because, where Examples are plain, perfect, and pertinent, as theirs were, there Imitation is not only safe, but becomes a Duty, it being the Nature of such Examples, in things imitable, to carry the Force of Precepts, and that with equal Authority, and less Ambiguity.

1. As to our Saviour, we find he kept a strict and constant Communion with the *Jewish Church* in all its legal Ordinances during his abode on Earth, tho' the Corruptions of it were flaming and notorious, and the Treatment he met with from the Rulers, and great Men, was so outragiously provoking.

He was Circumcised, thereby laying himself under an Obligation of Obedience to it; He own'd, and submitted himself to the Governours then in being; He frequented the Service both of the Temple and Synagogue, tho' this was of human Authority only; He observ'd the Rites, and Customs, and Festivals of it, even that of the Dedication, tho' the Duty of this ran no higher than the Times of the *Maccabees*; He scrupled not to receive the Cup of Charity at the Pascual Solemnity, nor to conform himself to the Posture of Discumbiture at the Celebration of it, tho' the first was a plain Addition to, and the other as plain a Variation from, the Original Divine Institution: In a Word, Christ complied with all the religious Customs of those People, where they were not repugnant to the Moral and Evangelical Intention of the Law.

2. As to the Apostles, they, as their Master had, maintain'd a stated and uniform Communion with the same Church, and that not only while they liv'd under his Eye and Command, but for several Years after his Ascension; complying with all the lawful Forms then in use, and \* *continuing daily with one accord in the Temple*.

It's true, both Christ, and his Apostles did dissent from the Corruptions and Innovations which had crept into Religion through the vile Glosses and Traditions of the *Pharisees*; but where these Reasons of Dissension were not visible, they were constant Conformists.

It's true likewise, the Apostles, after the Descent of the Holy Ghost, had their separate Meetings for the Celebration of the Sacraments, and for Prayer, and for the Propagation of the great Designs of the Gospel: But, being now under the Influence of a new Article of Faith, *viz.* that Jesus is the *Messias*, this became unavoidable to them, after the *Jews* had forbidden them to Preach in the Name of Jesus, and had denied them the Use of the Temple on that account: But these things excepted, they firmly adher'd, for some Years, I say, after the Departure of Christ to Heaven, to the œconomy of the *Jewish* Church.

God was willing *Moses* should keep the Chair, while his Spirit was yet brooding over the new Creation, and informing the sinful Chaos, and creating a new Heaven, and a new Earth; He was willing to allow a Compliance, as he had at the first Institution of their Religion, with the Humours of a carnal Church, even when her Power and Authority were waning, trying thus the last Efforts of his Grace and Mercy in waiting on the Conversion of his antient People in their own Way and Perswasion.

If then our Blessed Lord and his Apostles had a full View and Perception of all the Boundaries of Duty and Obligation as to Church-Communion, as they most certainly had; If they, I say, were neither deceiv'd themselves, nor would deceive others, 'tis to be hop'd, by considering a little more distinctly under what Circumstances they Communicated with the *Jewish* Church, we may come at last to a settled Judgment in the Case before us, and discover upon what Grounds the Principles of Separation rest; or rather, upon Grounds they do not rest.

1. Is it urg'd, That human Impositions, and framing new Terms of Communion, are just Reasons of Separation? Yet, neither Christ, nor Apostles, thought so; since they not only Communicated with a Church wherein many human Ordinances were enjoin'd, but also submitted to the Use and Observation of them themselves; as is evident from their Compliance with the Synagogue Worship; their Celebration of the Passover after the modern Forms; their observing the Feast of the Dedication; and from their submission to the Government then in being.

God had expressly determin'd all the Modes and Rites of the *Pascal* Solemnity; he had positively fix'd the High Priesthood to one Tribe, to one certain Family of that Tribe, and

to one particular Branch of that Family : Yet, as in the former Case, general Consent, or human Authority, had brought in many Alterations ; so in the latter, from the Time of the *Maccabees*, many great Breaches had happen'd in the Succession of the Pontificate ; and after the *Romans* had seiz'd the Government, it became arbitrary and annual ; but in both Cases, Christ and his Apostles submitted to what Time, or subsequent Authority, had introduc'd.

This I take to be an Argument, *à fortiori*, why our Dissenters should submit to the present Constitution, notwithstanding the Impositions in Rites, or the Alterations in Government, they complain of, since, as I humbly conceive, the Alteration of any thing settled by Divine Authority, is more exceptionable, than the Addition of something to it ; and the Abrogating a Divine Institution sounds much harsher, than commanding Obedience to a Human one.

2. Is it said, For the Sake of better Edification, a Man may quit a lawful Church, and present himself where the great Duties of Religion are more powerfully taught ? But then, Why did not Christ, why did not his Apostles, renounce the weak and beggarly Elements of the Law ? Or, Were not their own Divine Discourses and Prayers more edifying to themselves, and better fitted to work on the Wills and Affections of others, than the typical Emblems of a dead Law ? A Law without any other visible Tokens of Divine Grace resting upon it, besides the bare Existence of its eternal Polity !

But since, notwithstanding this, they continued in the Communion and Observance of it, they thereby afford us a rare Example of Humility, and plainly discover, how much more pleasing to God a peaceable Submission to mean and weak Institution is, than, at the Price of the Church's Peace, the hunting after purer and sublimer Methods of Worship can be, tho' supported with never so much Pretence of doing greater Honour to God, or of making better Provision for our selves.

3. Doth Errors and Corruptions in Religion give a just Occasion of Separation ? Yet, we do not find that either Christ or his Apostles, did depart from the Communion of the *Jewish* Church, however liable to those Objections.

The *Jews* had foully corrupted the Prophecies relating to the *Messias*, and had spread a Darkness over the Face of the Moral Law ; nay, they had made a considerable Change in the Body of their Religion by their Doctrines about the Rituals ; sup-



ing them to contain some Mystick Charms, and Sacramen-  
Holiness, proper for the Expiation of Sin, and the Puri-  
fication of the Soul; yet, we find, they thought not these  
Reasons sufficient to ground a Separation upon; thereby  
teaching us, that no Errors of Opinion will justify our De-  
parture from a lawful Church, while either the Foundation  
remains sound; or, supposing that infected with some Errors,  
that we can Communicate without the Sin and Infection  
of them.

4. Will the wicked Lives of the Members of a Church  
justify a Man in breaking with them, and joining himself to  
those of purer Lives, and greater Piety? But had Christ, had his  
Apostles thought so, they never, sure, would have led us into  
the contrary Opinion, by Communicating with a Sort of Men,  
than whom, none could well be more erroneous in their Opinions,  
or more flagitious in their Lives; who were, at that  
very time, resisting the plainest Evidences of a Divine Mis-  
sion; who first publicly crucified their Lord and Saviour, and  
then persecuted his Followers with all the Excess of Rage  
and Bitterness that a blind and impetuous Zeal could inspire  
them with.

5. Is it pretended, that set Forms of Prayer is a stinting  
of the Spirit, and a Derogation to the more plentiful Effu-  
sions of it under the Gospel? Yet, 'tis well known, \* *St. Paul*,  
express Command, not only limited the real Inspirations  
of the Holy Ghost, in the Church of *Corinth*, as to the Exer-  
cise of them; but that both he, and the other Apostles, as  
their Lord had done before them, held constant Communion  
with a Church, where all the Service was under settled  
forms.

6. Doth our symbolizing in some less material Points with  
every corrupt Church, alarm the Fears of our Dissenters,  
and make them agast? Yet, the Practice of Circumcision by  
the *Jewish* Converts, and pleading for the Necessity of it to  
others; the maintaining the Perpetuity of the Mosaick Dis-  
pensation, and that Justification was by that; was symbolizing  
with as corrupt a Church, and in a much more tender In-  
stance, than can be charg'd on us with respect to Popery, but  
for all that no Schism ensued on that account.

Nay, what's very observable, *St. Paul*, at the same time  
taught the *Gentiles*, that if they were Circumcised, they

\* 1 Cor. xiv.

were fallen from Grace, and that Christ should profit them nothing, not only Communicated himself with those who stiffly pleaded for the universal Obligation of the Law of *Moses*, but did so far symbolize with them, and the whole *Jewish* Church, as to allow Circumcision to the Christian *Jews*, and to practice it himself upon *Timothy*: He chose to symbolize and to become all things to all Men, where there was any hope that by that means he might save some, and where his symbolizing did not evacuate the Grounds of the Christian Faith but was a Symbol of Peace, and Order, and Charity, the Preservation of which, he thought of far greater Consequence than such foolish Niceties about Lawfuls and Unlawfuls, which separated from the Essence of Religion.

7. Is this reputed a justifiable Plea for Separation, that where Churches are not reform'd enough, it's necessary to keep our stated Communion with the best and purest, to be thereby in a Capacity to bear Testimony against Innovations and to give a stand to such encroaching Humours, as may in time, if let alone, debauch Religion, and corrupt the Simplicity of it?

But why then, in the Name of God! Did not the Apostle withdraw themselves from the *Jewish* Service to bear Testimony against the Cruelty and Inhumanity of those who had so lately imbru'd their Hands in their Master's Blood? To witness against the superstitious Notions, and gross Abuses brought into the Frame and Doctrines of their Religion? Against those fatal Blunders the *Jews* were fallen into about the *Messias*, in spite of Revelation and Miracles for their Conviction? Against Commandments and Ordinances now abolish'd; a Hand-writing blotted out, and a Covenant already cancell'd? Against the vilest Hypocrisie, the most flagrant Impieties, and the deepest Corruptions, that ever appeared under the Influence of any Revelation?

These Things being put together, it plainly, I hope, appears that whatever Objections can be made against Communion with our Establish'd Church, might have been urged and with a much better Grace, against the *Jewish* Church; and yet, both Christ and his Apostles chose rather to Communicate with it under all the Imperfections and Disorders then labour'd, than to separate for Reasons, as were inadequate to the Mischiefs of such a Separation: It's true, they testified with all their Might against the Corruptions of it but did not renounce Communion for them, nor seem at

appri

bris'd of those foolish Distinctions with which Men now  
 says cherish their Scruples, and embarras their Consciences.  
 If then the Example of the Son of God, if the Examples of  
 Apostles and the first Christians, if the Doctrines and  
 Principles laid down in the *New Testament*, can be thought  
 sufficient to determine this Debate; we have an irrefragable  
 Argument against the Principles of the present Separation,  
 may safely conclude, that a rash and unrestrain'd Zeal  
 for the Honour of God, and the Purity of Religion, will not  
 always bear Men out in breaking the Peace of the Church;  
 since we live in a World wherein Corruptions do, and  
 will, abound; the Purposes of God and Religion will be bet-  
 ter serv'd in bearing with them in the Spirit of Meekness,  
 than, under the Pretence of Reformation, to rend and distract  
 the Church by our unnatural Divisions; that the best Designs,  
 when destitute of Peace and Charity, when manag'd with  
 Contention, Pride, and a dividing Spirit, are not so plea-  
 sant to God, as an humble Submission to Laws, and Go-  
 vernours, and establish'd Forms, tho' lying under some Dis-  
 orders and Imperfections: In a Word, we may now con-  
 clude, that our Dissenting Brethren must either quit an un-  
 reasonable Separation, and return into the Bosom of the  
 Church again, or else, in the Judgment of all considering  
 Men, it will be taken for granted, that they disavow the  
 Authority of Christ, and his Apostles, and would separate  
 from them were they now on Earth, and maintain'd those  
 Principles by which they govern'd themselves in their Com-  
 munion with the *Jewish Church*.

But whatever Effects these, or the like Considerations,  
 have on Mens Minds; yet, what we in the mean time  
 have to do, and how to behave our selves in the midst of the  
 unhappy Broils and Contentions which fatigue the Age, is a  
 thing worthy of our most serious Consideration, that so, if  
 we are not able to give other People satisfaction, we may at  
 least discharge our own Duty, and keep our selves free from  
 the Blood of all Men. This brings me,

To shew what Engagements we lie under, during these  
 unhappy Distractions, as to our own Practice. I will deliver  
 myself very briefly, and with all imaginable Deference and  
 Submission, in these Three Particulars.

We are oblig'd, where we can avoid it, not to give  
 scandal and Offence to our weak Brethren.



2. In our Reasonings and Conversation with them to treat them with Humanity and Respect.

3. To be exemplary in our own Lives and Conversations.

1. We are oblig'd, where we handsomely can avoid it, not to give Scandal and Offence to our weak Brethren, by an uncharitable Use of our Liberty, in making it subservient to the little Views of a Party, and a contemptuous Treatment of the lower Attainments of others.

There is a great Variety in the Make of Mens Minds; the same Thing that seems true and reasonable to me, may not so to another, and perhaps cannot by any Forms of Reasoning be made to appear so. And whenever this happens, both Scripture and Reason oblige us not to grow impatient at our Disappointment, but to stoop to Necessity, to recede contentedly from our own Priviledges, and wave what we may lawfully do, whenever the Good of our Brother calls for it, remembering that noble Instance of Charity in St. Paul, \* *Wherefore if Meat make my Brother to offend, I will eat no Flesh while the World standeth, lest I make my Brother to offend.*

This, I very well know, ought to be understood of such Things, and in such Cases, wherein the Law has not determined, and where we are under no superior Obligation; that even here a prudent and good Man will go as far as possible he can, and will evidence by the Frame of his Actions, that he placeth no undue Value on those Things that are now controverted between us; that he reposeth no Hopes, no Confidence in them; that he considers them as Things of the lowest Rank in the Course of a Christian's Duty; can neither make him a wiser or better Man; are no otherwise good than as they are commanded; and that his own Submission to them is for the Sake of Peace and Order, and in Acknowledgment of that just Authority he lives under.

And, surely, 'tis a much likelier way to prevail with Dissenters to submit to the Use of our Ceremonies, by treating them according to their own proper and intrinsic Value, and by shewing, in the Course of our Lives, of what little Weight they are to justify Quarrels and Divisions among Christians, than by priding and valuing our selves upon them as if the main Business of Religion, and Life, and Duty turn'd on such poor and empty Things.

Doubtless, it is a great Felicity to a Man to be well acquainted of his Christian Liberty, and to know how far he may go

compliance with publick Authority for the Sake of Peace and Order; but 'tis preposterous and absurd to shew an equal Zeal for Rite or a Ceremony, as a Man should do for an Article of his Creed, or for one of the *Ten Commandments*; as if Sacrifice was better than Mercy, or that Circumcision, or Uncircumcision, was more valuable in the Eyes of God, than a new Creature.

Such Things may be useful and significant in their proper Order, but carrying them beyond this, has, I fear, given great Occasion to Scandal to Dissenters, and prov'd a great Impediment to their conviction.

2. In all our Debates and Conversation with them, to treat them with Humanity and Respect. It is ill Manners, and of dangerous Consequence, to scoff at, or revile, what another thinks sacred, and founded on the Word of God. As I have made the Example of Christ an Argument of the great Unreasonableness of Separation, so the same excellent Example may be of great Use, to shew what our Deportment ought to be towards the Dissenters.

Our Blessed Saviour, at the same time he Communicated with the *Jews*, did all he could to reform and set them right in many points, and sometimes rebuked them sharply for their Faults; but then he did it with so much Candor and Good-will, that they could lie under no Apprehension of its proceeding from any thing but a real and hearty Concern for their Good. When they contradicted and blasphem'd, he meekly suffers a mistaken Zeal to cool, and spend it self, calmly justifies his Conduct, and contents himself in the gracious Evidences of his own Divine Goodness.

When the Hardness of their Hearts, or the Slowness of their Understandings, made them less capable of his heavenly Instructions, he patiently waits more proper and promising Opportunities: He argues with them in every Form, by Parables, by Allusions, from their own Laws and Concessions, from the Nature of Things, and the common Notions of Mankind: He tries to speak to their Affections, as well as to their Understandings, and to meet their Mistakes both with Arguments of Love, and of Reason.

If we would make an Advantage of our Saviour's Example in arguing the Point of Conformity with our Dissenters, it is but just and reasonable we should follow the same Divine Example in the Management of our Arguments.

Arguments where they are, tho' not abusive, yet, dry and uninteresting, such is the childish Pride of human Nature, which lovesamouring and fondling Methods, are seldom seen to do much good, but often to make Men more Wayward and Peevish; but where they are charg'd with Charity, and seem to be the genuine Effects of Sincerity and Friendship, there better Success may reasonably be expected.

3. To be Exemplary in our own Lives and Conversations: This, above all things, will set off the Cause of our Church to the best Advantage, and will put all our Reasonings for it into the best and

and clearest Light. It was a terrible Argument against Philosophy, as the *Roman* Orator tells us, that many of the Philosophers liv'd such irregular Lives; *Philosophus in ratione vita peccans, hoc turpius est, quod in Officio, cuius Magister esse vult, labitur; ne temq; vita professus, delinquit in vita.* The ill Conduct of Men's Manners will bring a Scandal on the best Institution; and we shall never reason well for Conformity, unless our Lives be as bright and as unexceptionable as our Arguments.

The Dissenters make the same Advantages of our Miscarriages to cry down and deprecate our Constitution, that Atheists do of our Divisions, to triumph over our common Christianity. Oh! Let us deprive them of this Refuge too; and, when our Cause is so very good, and our Reasonings so well founded, let us not blemish them by our irregular Manners, or put new and potent Objections into their Mouths by the Immorality of our Lives.

\* *Let not your Good, saith St. Paul, be evil spoken of*; intimating what a mighty Disadvantage it is to the best Cause, where the *Actors* are a Scandal to it.

Every good Man among us pleads powerfully for the Church by his own good Life, tho' he speaks not one Word in the Debate. But where good Reasoning, and good Living, meet together, where our Arguments are fleg'd with Purity, Humility, Simplicity of Manners, and all Kind of Virtues, 'tis highly probable both from their own Value, and the great Blessing of God upon them, that they may then soften the Tempers of Men, and prove instructive. I will conclude with that excellent Collect,

*O Almighty God, who hast built thy Church upon the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself, being the chief corner Stone; Grant us to be joined together in Unity of Spirit by thy Doctrine, that we may be an holy Temple acceptable to thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all Honour, Glory, and Praise, now and for evermore. Amen.*

\* Rom. xiv. 16.



F I N I S.

# ERRATA.

Title-Page for Wamford, read Warnford; Pag. 7. lin. 11. f. *Hypotheses*; p. 19. Margine, f. Cor. 8. 2. r. 1 Cor. 8. 2. p. 22. l. 2. f. *Seculi*, r. *Secuti*; p. 34. l. 29. f. *Nazentius*, r. *Mezentius*; p. 49. marg. f. *Stillingsfleet*, r. *Stillingsfleet*; p. 53. l. 13. f. in *forming*, r. *informing*; p. 60. l. 18. f. *Actors*, r. *Abettors*.



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